Biographical Note

Alva Pearson was born Alva Strandell on June 22, 1894 in Borlänge, Sweden. She and her brother Axel lived with their parents, Johanna Vikström and Johan Strandell; her father was employed at a sawmill. When Alva was only two years old, her mother died and her father remarried a woman named Emma. Emma and Johan had one son named Oscar. Alva enjoyed her childhood in Sweden, working, going to school, skating, and skiing. The Christmas holiday was especially fun with the traditional cooking and decorating. Alva's brother Axel moved to America around 1903, settling in Everett, Washington. When Alva's father died of pneumonia, her stepmother encouraged her to join Axel, even though Alva wanted to stay in Sweden and become a schoolteacher. On her way to America in 1910, Alva sewed her money in her dress for fear someone would steal it. Upon her arrival, she found work in Tacoma, first caring for children and then housekeeping. Alva was one of the first women to join the Good Temperance Lodge in 1912; she is the only charter member surviving. Alva obtained her citizenship when she married an American named Axel Anderson who owned a restaurant. They had three children: Kathleen, Lennard, and Wally. Kathleen and Lennard worked during the Great
Depression while Alva worked at Weyerhaeuser. Her husband fell ill and sold the restaurant; he died in 1949. The following year, Alva married Dan Pearson, a Swedish man from the Valhalla Lodge who worked at a carpentry shop. Sadly, ten years later Dan died. Alva has remained in the Tacoma area and attends First Covenant Church. She has returned to Sweden eight times, and her children and some grandchildren can speak the language.

Lineage


Content Description

The interview was conducted with Alva Pearson on October 8, 1981 in Tacoma, Washington. This interview contains information on personal background, emigration, work, community life, family, and Swedish heritage. The interview was conducted in English.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

There are no restrictions on use.

Administrative Information

Custodial History

The Oral History collection project was started during an experimental course on Scandinavian Women in the Pacific Northwest. Students in the course were encouraged to interview women and learn about their experiences as immigrants to the United States. The project was continued and expanded with support from the president's office and by grants from the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, from the Joel E. Ferris Foundation and the Norwegian Emigration Fund of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project was directed by Dr. Janet E. Rasmussen. The collection was transferred to the Archives and Special Collections Department.

Acquisition Information

Related Materials

To search and view Pacific Lutheran University's digitized images, visit our Digital Assets Website

Processing Note

The interview was conducted by Inger Nygaard Carr using a cassette recorder. A research copy was also prepared from the original. To further preserve the content of the interview, it is now being transferred to compact disc. We deliberately did not transcribe the entire interview because we want the researchers to listen to the interviewee's own voice. The transcription index highlights important
aspects of the interview and the tape counter numbers noted on the Partial Interview Transcription are
meant as approximate finding guides and refer to the location of a subject on the cassette/CD. The
recording quality is good.

The collection was transcribed by Mary Sue Gee, Julie Peterson and Becky Husby.

Bibliography

Rasmussen, Janet Elaine. *New Land New Lives: Scandinavian Immigrants to the Pacific Northwest*

Detailed Description of the Collection

The partial interview transcription highlights important aspects of the interview. Numbers may be used
as guides to important subjects. Two numbers separated by a slash indicate that the first number is for
cassette and the second for CD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassette</td>
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| 97, side 1   | 004: PERSONAL BACKGROUND  
Born Borlänge, Sweden on June 22, 1894. |
| 97, side 1   | 008: PARENTS  
Johanna Vikström, Johan Strandell employed at a sawmill. Father remarried after mother died. Alva lost mother when 2 years old. Talks about family home. Father remarried to Emma, who came to work as a housekeeper. |
| 97, side 1   | 023: GRANDPARENTS  
Maternal grandparents, Vikstrom. Aunt Gustava Bergström told her some family history. |
| 97, side 1   | 036:  
Eight trips back to Sweden (see counter 525-I) |
| 97, side 1   | 037:  
Brother Axel came to America at age 17. No work in Sweden. Half-brother Oscar joined Alva in Tacoma later. |
| 97, side 1   | 046: CHILDHOOD  
Lots of friends. Everybody had to work, lots of work. Took care of the children and dug potatoes. Big picnics and good food after work. |
| 97, side 1   | 059:  
Skating and skiing in the winter months. |
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| 97, side 1   | 061: SCHOOL DAYS  
Started school age 7, attended for 4 years. Confirmation: attended class every week. Many students in class. |
| 97, side 1   | 076: EMPLOYMENT  
Many opportunities for work in the Borlänge area with the sawmill and papermill. |
| 97, side 1   | 082:  
Father died of pneumonia. Mother caught cold and died. Axel worked at the sawmill too. |
| 97, side 1   | 097: CHRISTMAS  
Lots of baking, could smell Christmas. Father went into the woods for tree. Decorated the tree. Made lutfisk, rice pudding, coffee bread, and lots of cookies. Buggy ride to church. Christmas was special because they were used to walking everywhere. |
| 97, side 1   | 127: REASON SHE CAME TO U.S.  
Step-mother wanted her to join her brother (he resided in Everett, WA). She found work, helped by Charlie Holmes in Tacoma. Didn't want to come to U.S. She wanted to be a school teacher in Sweden. |
| 97, side 1   | 137: TRIP OVER  
"No fun." Sewed money in dress - afraid someone might steal it. Took train to Göteborg, Sweden. Had to have $25 for U.S. immigration. Took boat from Göteborg (Gothenburg) to England. Many sick. Stayed in Liverpool for 2 days. 50 Swedes to a room. |
| 97, side 1   | 168: BOAT TO AMERICA  
Didn't get sick. Good food. Danced, had a good time. Simrikvital line (?). |
| 97, side 1   | 183: FEELINGS LEAVING SWEDEN  
Felt not loved, didn't understand. Didn't want to leave. |
| 97, side 1   | 192: LANDED BOSTON  
Put on train to Chicago, helped by police. Had food from Sweden to eat. Didn't talk to anyone - no Swedes on train. Took about a week. |
| 97, side 1   | 206: ARRIVAL TACOMA  
Nobody met her. Teacher from Indian school took her to friends. |
| 97, side 1   | 231: FINDING A JOB  
Took care of child in south Tacoma. Later employed as a housekeeper - $10.00 monthly plus room and board. Later earned $20.00. |
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| 97, side 1   | 267: LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES  
Hard to learn. Learned from people she worked with. Street car went past the house. Cost 5 cents, couldn't afford it. |
| 97, side 1   | 298: GOOD TEMPERANCE LODGE  
One of the first women to join in 1912, only charter member surviving. Went every Thursday evening - still attends meetings. |
| 97, side 1   | 330: CITIZENSHIP  
Through marriage - first husband was American. Met husband at Valhalla. |
| 97, side 1   | 339: FIRST HUSBAND  
Axel Anderson. Describes wedding in Seattle in a pastor's house. Describes mode of dress on wedding day. Had restaurant on "K" street. Honeymoon in Victoria B.C. |
| 97, side 1   | 369:  
Describes Tacoma in early days. Rented a house and later bought a home. |
| 97, side 1   | 378: CHILDREN  
Kathleen - lives in California. Married to Richard Wright who worked in insurance. Lennard - lives in Lakewood and teaches music. Wally - works at Oakland TV in Tacoma. Alva has six great grandchildren. |
| 97, side 1   | 424: CHURCH  
Children attended Sunday school. Didn't attend Lutheran church in U.S. (see counter 489-I). Attended First Covenant where her son played the organ. |
| 97, side 1   | 438: DEPRESSION  
Son and daughter worked. Alva worked at Weyerhaeuser. Housework and childcare. Husband was sick during depression - had sold the restaurant. Died in 1949. |
| 97, side 1   | 480:  
Remarried in 1950 to Dan Pearson. Employed at carpentry shop. Deceased after 10 years of marriage (also Swedish). |
| 97, side 1   | 489: CHURCH LIFE  
First Covenant. Treasurer of the Ladies Aid. Many Swedes were members (see counter 424-I) |
| 97, side 1   | 498:  
Children spoke Swedish before school days. Still speaks Swedish with friends. Some grandchildren can speak Swedish today. |
525: TRIPS BACK TO SWEDEN
First time in 1955, 46 years after coming to America. Describes family home, changes in Sweden similar to U.S. Last trip 7 years ago at age 80 - went back to visit good friends (see counter 036-I). Eight trips back total. Talks about friends who returned to Sweden to get the benefits. Eight trips back total.

610: PLU
Both son and husband had Professor Stuen for a teacher.

629:
Closes in Swedish

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :
Christmas
Depressions -- 1929
Emigration and immigration
Family -- Sweden
Marriage service
Ocean travel
Railroad travel
Sweden -- Social conditions -- 1945-
Swedish-Americans -- Ethnic identity
Swedish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
Swedish-Americans--Social life and customs

Personal Names :
Pearson, Alva--Interviews
Anderson, Axel
Pearson, Dan
Vikström, Johanna
Anderson, Alva
Anderson, Lennard
Anderson, Wally
Strandell, Alva
Wright, Kathleen

Corporate Names :
First Covenant Church (Tacoma, Wash.)
Good Templars, Independent Order of (Tacoma, Wash.)
Swedish Order of Valhalla Tacoma, (Wash)

Family Names :
Anderson family
Bergström family
Pearson family
Strandell family
Vikström family
Wright family

**Geographical Names:**
Borlänge (Sweden)
Everett (Wash.)
Tacoma (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms:**
Oral histories

**Occupations:**
Domestics
Sawmill workers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004