

Anna Johanna Kristina Laursen Oral History, 1978

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Laursen, Anna Johanna Kristina
Title	Anna Johanna Kristina Laursen Oral History
Dates	1978 (inclusive) 1978 1978
Quantity	1 sound cassette 2 file folders 2 compact discs
Collection Number	t010
Summary	An oral history interview with Anna Johanna Kristina Laursen, a Danish immigrant.
Repository	Pacific Lutheran University, Archives and Special Collections Archives and Special Collections Pacific Lutheran University 12180 Park Avenue South Tacoma, Washington 98447 Telephone: 253-535-7586 Fax: 253-535-7315 archives@plu.edu
Access Restrictions	The oral history collection is open to all users.
Additional Reference Guides	
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

Anna Johanna Kristina Laursen was born on June 11, 1896 in Copenhagen, Denmark. When her father lost his job, he decided to immigrate to America with his wife and two children. Anna's father and brother went first and were soon followed by Anna and her mother. They settled in Tacoma, WA near Anna's mother's uncle who owned a berry farm in Puyallup, WA. Anna's father bought a house in the Oakland area near 33rd and South Adams. Anna was eighteen at the time and thrilled to be in America. Anna met her husband, Marinus Laursen, at a Danish church and was married when she was twenty. Marinus was also born in Denmark and had obtained his American citizenship in 1910. Anna and Marinus had five children: Elmer, Elsie, Norma, Betty, and Richard. After Richard was seven or eight, Anna opened a variety store with a neighbor and later went on to work in a cleaning shop when Richard was twelve. Anna and Marinus were very active in the community. Marinus belonged to the Danish Brotherhood and Anna to the Sisterhood. These organizations gave them many social opportunities including cards, dances, and meetings. Anna was also involved in a Danish church, the Oakland Church, and the PTA. Anna and Marinus subscribed to Danish newspapers for many years,

but Anna never insisted that the children learn Danish as well. She believed their American schoolwork was the first priority. Anna and Marinus lived in Tacoma for sixty-two years.

Lineage

Full Name: Anna Johanna Kristina Laursen. Maiden Name: Anna Johanna Kristina Nielsen. Brothers and Sisters: One brother. Spouse: Marinus Laursen. Children: Elmer Laursen, Elsie Laursen, Norma Laursen, Betty Laursen, Richard Laursen.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Anna Laursen on May 24, 1978 in Tacoma, WA. It includes information on Anna's family background, emigration, settling in, marriage and family, Danish heritage, Danish organizations, and church. 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 Steve Melton 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* Tacoma, Washington University of Washington Press 1993

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.

Container(s)	Description
Cassette	
10, side 1	004: FAMILY BACKGROUND Anna Johanna Kristina Laursen. Maiden name is Nielsen. She is 81 now, born on June 11, 1896. Husband was Marinus Laursen, and they were married February 17, 1916. They have five children: Elmer [a Lutheran minister and former chaplain in San Francisco], Elsie, Norma, Betty, and Richard [with the Safeco Insurance Co]. Anna has lived in the Tacoma area since she emigrated on November 17, 1914.
10, side 1	071: WORK She did housework before marriage. After the children grew up, she worked at the lunch room in Rhodes Department Store and as a presser in a cleaners. She made sure she wasn't neglecting the children while working. Anna came from Copenhagen. Father was in business with a firm that sold agricultural seeds, bulbs, etc. Grandfather used to make wooden shoes. After he retired, he became a bill collector so he could get in walking and exercise.
10, side 1	114: EMIGRATION There are no relatives left in Denmark that she knows about. Anna only had the one brother, and he and her parents emigrated to America also. She thinks her dad's firm went bankrupt, and they released him after 20 years of work. He always thought about emigrating to America even though his wife was strict against it. He'd always say "Anna, do you want to go to America with me?". "Sure! I was ready to go. But mother said no, nothing doing". When Dad lost his job, the decision was easier. Mother had an uncle with a berry farm in Puyallup with whom she corresponded. Father and brother came first; Mother and Anna followed. It was a group decision to emigrate, but Father had a travel bug in him. Before marriage he had spent three years in South America and wanted to see something different.

Container(s)	Description
10, side 1	<p>170: Dad and brother stayed in Puyallup with the uncle who was a widower with several children. The children were grown and married, some were schoolteachers, etc. Father got a job at St. Paul Mill, 10 hours a day--manual labor which was new for him. Then he worked at Northern Pacific painting cars. When he grew tired of that job, he opened a grocery in Midland and had that until he retired at the age of 72.</p>
10, side 1	<p>200: Anna and her mother took the steamship "United States" which ran between Copenhagen and Kristiansand, but didn't stop in England. They left on October 29, 1914, and the trip took 12 days. Dad and brother arrived on July 4th and stayed in the harbor until they could disembark on the 5th.</p>
10, side 1	<p>256: There were no problems on the ship. World War I had started, and an English boat stopped and boarded their ship in Mid-Atlantic. Mother and Anna shared a cabin with a Mrs. Norsker (?) and her two girls. Both mothers were sick, so she took care of the two girls. One day Anna tripped over a rope on deck and fell flat on her face. Her nose swelled and her face turned black and blue. When she landed, she looked terrible. Went to a surgeon and asked for relief and advice, and he said "No, my dear. Just patience--patience". But the bump was on her nose and her eyes were discolored for months. She was 18 at the time of emigration.</p>
10, side 1	<p>306: Father had a place to live. Later on, Anna's husband bought and fixed up the same house, and they lived there for 34 years.</p>
10, side 1	<p>315: SETTLING IN Anna didn't like New York because of all the big buildings; it wasn't like Copenhagen. Mom and Anna got off at the Tacoma depot and had to wait for Father. They had the house number, 1921 Durango Street, so when Father didn't come she took the address to the traveler's aid. They had never heard of it. But pretty soon, Dad came on the streetcar and all was okay. Anna was thrilled about coming here. The Oakland area at 33d and South Adams near the Oakland grade school was wilderness: no street or sidewalks--just a few trails and houses. Father had met another Danish family, and they lived on the same plot. Their daughter eventually became her brother's wife. The Nielsen's ate their first supper in America with this family--a nice welcome, Anna recalls.</p>
10, side 1	<p>378: They had always rented an apartment in Copenhagen, so buying and living in a house were different. Anna had worked as an office nurse, telephone girl, etc. for a lady dentist in Denmark. Later on she learned to make dentures. If her English language skills were better, she could have gotten a similar job here. She'd had English fundamentals in school, but there was a huge</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>difference between book-English and American speech. But Anna got along "by keeping my ears open and reading...listening to people when they talk. Just absorbing everything. It didn't take me very long to learn it". The rest of the family learned English also. Mother, Dad and Anna continued to speak Danish around the house.MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: Anna and her husband both knew Danish but usually didn't use it. She gained her citizenship through marriage in 1916. That law was changed in '21 or '22. She was 20 years old at marriage. Marinus was born in Denmark and had gotten his American papers in 1910.</p>
10, side 1	<p>450: They lived in the North End in a rented apartment for four months, and then moved to the Oakland area. The neighbor lady in the first house took in washing, and had the washing machine on the back porch above them. Between her machine and her cussing at the kids, Anna and Marinus decided to move. He bought a run-down place and changed all the windows, partitions, etc. He had been trained in Denmark as a carpenter/cabinetmaker.</p>
10, side 1	<p>486: Husband belonged to the Danish Brotherhood and she to the Sisterhood. They had lots of good times in those days as it was a main source of sociability: cards, dances, meetings. She always took the kids along; would bed them down on the benches. When it was time to go, they'd pick the kids up, catch the streetcar, and put the kids to bed again at home. Anna never played cards, but would invite people over and while they played, she did embroidery. They didn't have a radio for a long time, and when they did, you couldn't count on it working when you wanted to hear a special program.</p>
10, side 1	<p>527: HOLIDAYS AND TRADITIONS In Denmark there was always a first Christmas day [Easter, etc.] and then the second day. Here, they got together with two-three families and had big parties. Christmas Eve was celebrated in a Danish manner with a huge tree that went to the ceiling and with candles on it. Any fire was extinguished with a big wet rag on a long stick. They never had any real fires. The kids could dance until 11 o'clock at night, and then the adults took over the dance floor. Anna danced with both groups. Entertainment in those days usually consisted of dinners and visiting. Denmark now celebrates the 4th of July in Jylland out in the hills. There is a log cabin with words from all the states in America. The royalty comes and there are speeches--a big holiday now. When she was a child, they had a children's day, "barnejobsdag" ?. The children would dress up and go door-to-door collecting money in boxes for the more unfortunate children.</p>
10, side 1	<p>605: They subscribed to Danish newspapers for many years, and there is still one on the Coast. There was little mingling of Scandinavian organizations then, except for the Leif Eriksson group. The Sisterhood met in one of two halls side-by-side to the Brotherhood. After separate meetings, the two groups would gather for the social evening--dancing, eating, playing cards, etc. They also belonged to a Danish Church where she first saw her husband. The minister</p>

Container(s)	Description
	was(?), and he helped them put on Danish plays. Anna was in several that included lots of singing and performing, both locally and in the Seattle Danish Hall.
10, side 1	650: DANISH FOOD After Sisterhood and Brotherhood meetings, open faced sandwiches were served. Anna made quite a few Danish meals at home including pea soup, kale soup, chicken soup with dumplings.
10, side 1	674: At the Young People's Society at church they would have district meetings with dinners and lots of people. Anna helped serve food. She also sang in the choir at this church, Danish Lutheran on South 13th and L--a nice, old church. Her mother and she belonged to the Ladies Aid. Sheridan Lutheran and Danish Lutheran merged later. The children were baptized in the Oakland Church. It was close and convenient; it was hard to transport four kids by streetcar. She was very active in this church also; sang in the choir, directed another, and helped with dinners. Two daughters were married in Oakland Church, the older son in Moorhead, MN and the younger in Seattle.
10, side 1	732: After the younger son was 7 or 8, Anna opened a variety store in partnership with another woman on Center St. The youngest boy could walk there from school for lunch, and again when school finished. Then she worked in a cleaning shop in 1952 when Richard was 12. Her brother worked for the a laundry/cleaners and asked her if she wanted to be a repair woman. Her job consisted of checking military uniforms for spots, missing buttons, etc.
10, side 1	761: Their first doctor in Tacoma was Dr. Quivley (?), a Norwegian. The five children were born over a 23 year span, all in Tacoma General Hospital with Dr. McCreary?.
10, side 2	033: She told the children Danish fairy stories. The oldest son grew up near his Danish Grandmother in Oakland, and she spoke Danish to him. He still knows many words. The oldest girl knew a little, and each successive child knew a little less. The last boy was born in 1940. She didn't insist on the children learning Danish. "I tell you what. I believe...that the children go to school. There's no use of me imprinting a whole lot of that stuff in them. They got to go ahead in their own schoolwork. America comes first...with the kids when they grow up. So I did everything I could to help them in their schoolwork". She was asked by Oakland teachers to talk about Denmark and its traditions. She never taught prayers to the children in Danish, but she still knows, likes, and recites one: "I Jesu navn gr vi til bords...".
10, side 2	124:

Container(s)	Description
	<p>Anna attended a private school in Copenhagen for high school. Brother had to finish two years of schooling in America. In school, she did well in geography--countries, capitol cities, etc. So much of that has changed since the wars. She also had one year each of German, French, and English, and she was quite good in German. Girls began knitting, embroidering, and sewing. They did fine hand-stitching, not machine sewing. She still does embroidery work. School began at 9 am and stopped at 3 pm. In the first part of July, final exams were held in all subjects. Then they had a short summer vacation. School began again around the 18th of August.</p>
10, side 2	<p>222: School provided a general education--no special training. She has done a lot of volunteer work with the PTA. At one point she had one child at Oakland, one at Jason Lee, and one at Stadium. She attended all the PTA meetings and was on the board of some. In addition, she was always very active in church.</p>
10, side 2	<p>248: SIGNIFICANT HAPPENINGS During WWII there was shortage and rationing. There were groups who helped the Danish people at this time. She didn't know about any of her relatives. Their own family never suffered during the Depression. She kept right on buying butter, because her husband didn't believe in cutting back on the children's food. She had to watch the money carefully, but there was no hardship. Her husband worked for W. B. Wingard ? and Son who put in butcher cases, etc. He worked there for 20 years. He was lucky; had no problem in getting and keeping jobs. They had four children during the Depression so things were stretched. The Oakland area was enjoyable; they lived on a dead-end street. In the winter, the kids could sled on "Larsen's Hill" and they had a wonderful time. After her husband died, Anna would walk home from work to a dark house at 9-10 PM with no trouble. The girls rode the bus and had three blocks to walk--no bother.</p>
10, side 2	<p>365: They lived in Tacoma area 62 years. She met quite a few prominent Tacoma women through PTA, but no one real special.</p>
10, side 2	<p>387: Another person to interview might be Emma Grant.</p>

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Danes -- Ethnic identity

Danish-Americans --Interviews

Danish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Social life and customs

Emigration and immigration

Personal Names :

Laursen, Anna Johanna Kristina--Interviews
(creator)

Laursen, Betty

Laursen, Elmer

Laursen, Elsie

Laursen, Marinus

Laursen, Richard

Laursen, Norma

Nielsen, Anna

Corporate Names :

Danish Brotherhood in America (Tacoma, Wash.)

Danish Lutheran Church (Tacoma, Wash.)

Danish Sisterhood of America, Lodge 19 (Tacoma, Wash.)

Oakland Lutheran Church (Tacoma, Wash.)

United States (Steamship)

Family Names :

Laursen family

Nielsen family

Geographical Names :

Copenhagen (Denmark)

Puyallup (Wash.)

Tacoma (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Cabinetmakers

Carpenters

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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