Lydia Savolainen Christenson Oral History Interview, 1982

Overview of the Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creator</th>
<th>Christenson, Lydia Savolainen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Lydia Savolainen Christenson Oral History Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dates            | 1982 (inclusive)  
1982 1982 |
| Quantity         | 2 file folders  
1 sound cassette |
| Collection Number | t177 |
| Summary          | An oral history interview with Lydia Savolainen Christenson, a Finnish 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

Lydia Christenson was born on February 12, 1891 in Laukaa, Finland to Otto Savolainen and Hilma Kerurolaine. Her father was a businessman, and there were four other children in the family. Lydia attended school for four or five years, but attendance was not mandatory, and the children were taught how to read and write at home also. Lydia immigrated to the United States when she was eighteen years old. She came with a group of teenagers from her neighborhood and planned on returning to Finland. Upon her arrival, Lydia began working at a laundry in Connecticut and then became a housekeeper in Worcester, Massachusetts. In Worcechester, Lydia met her husband, Amund Christenson, at the Assembly of God church. Amund was originally from Norway and became a preacher. They had five children together: Arthur, Ray, Arnold, Enoch, and Elaine. Through the years, the family lived in various towns throughout the Midwest, and Amund could be compared to a travelling evangelist. Amund passed away while they were living in Missoula, Montana, and Lydia then moved to Seattle, where Arthur and Ray lived. She bought a small house and got a cooking job at Fredrick and...
Nelsons, retiring at age sixty-five. Lydia has not been active in any Finnish organizations, but has made two trips back to Finland and cooked some traditional Finnish foods for her family throughout the years.

Lineage


Content Description

This interview was conducted with Lydia Christenson on May 17, 1982 in Seattle, Washington. It contains information on family background, emigration, marriage and family, and Finnish heritage. Lydia's oldest son wife speaks on the tape also. The information 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**


**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>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cassette</strong></td>
<td>027/010: Hilma Lydia Savolainen Christenson. Born in Laukaa, Finland, a community in central Finland, on February 12, 1891.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177, side 1</td>
<td>089/062: PARENTS Hilma Kerurolaine and Otto Savolainen. Father was a businessman. He had a country store and a farm with cows and horses. They sold cream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177, side 1</td>
<td>153/102: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Two older brothers - Otto and Lauri. One older sister - Elli and another sister Liisa. One brother eventually took over the store which was by the lake. A boat would bring things for the store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177, side 1</td>
<td>197: GRANDPARENTS She doesn't remember them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177, side 1</td>
<td>223: CHILDHOOD She worked in the store when she was old enough. She remembers selling bundles of tobacco that smelled terrible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177, side 1</td>
<td>253: SCHOOL Went to school for 4 or 5 years. Attending school wasn't mandatory. She learned to read and write at home too. School wasn't very close to home. Lydia says it was fun to ski to school in the winter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177, side 1</td>
<td>287: CHURCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Container(s)</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wasn't close to home. Preacher went to each home once a year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 177, side 1 | 305: CHRISTMAS  
Similar to Christmas here - presents. She remembers one Christmas when she first tasted wine. Did lots of baking weeks before. They had rice mush, cooked in milk, with sugar on it on Christmas Eve. They went to church early Christmas morning. You could hear horse bells all over. They had lots to eat at Christmas - meat, butter, everything. They had a Christmas tree. |
| 177, side 1 | 377: CONFIRMATION  
Confirmed in the Lutheran church, the state church in Finland. |
| 177, side 1 | 386: REASONS FOR COMING TO AMERICA  
Came when about 18 years old. Came for the fun of it with a bunch of boys and girls from her neighborhood in 1913. "We didn't get ready for the trip, we just went." Sailed from Hanko (Hangoe) to England. Took another boat from England to New York. Came to New York during the summer. Got sick on the boat. Parents didn't want her to go. Lydia didn't worry. She thought she'd return to Finland. |
| 177, side 1 | 465: NEW YORK  
Thought it was a big city. No problems coming through Ellis Island. |
| 177, side 1 | 477:  
Stayed on East Coast. Worked at a laundry in Connecticut. She was with a friend, who also worked at the laundries. |
| 177, side 1 | 488: LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES  
"We had lots of laughs because we didn't know what they said." Learned the language from hearing it all the time. |
| 177, side 1 | 510: MEETING SPOUSE  
She lived with a cousin in Worcester, Mass. And worked. Met husband at a prayer meeting at the Assembly of God. Her husband was Norwegian. He became a preacher. |
| 177, side 1 | 575: WORK  
When Lydia met her husband, she worked as a housekeeper. She earned $4 a week. She liked housekeeping better than the laundry work. Learned different kinds of cooking. Went to evening school to learn English. As a maid, she had to wear a black dress. American cooking not difficult. Tells about first time she made doughnuts. |
| 177, side 1 | 697: CHILDREN  
Five - Arthur, the eldest is a retired carpenter. He has 4 girls, who are married. Ray, the second son, is a retired salesman. Arnold, the third son, is a |
manufacturer’s representative. Enoch, the fourth son, lives in California and is an executive for the ARCO company. The fifth child is Elaine. She is married and lives near Reno, Nevada.

770: MOVING WEST
They moved to Minnesota after first three boys were born. Her husband, Amund, was preaching in small towns. They rented a house near Duluth, Minnesota. He died 43 years ago. They moved to North Dakota and then to South Dakota. They moved to Providence, Rhode Island then back to North Dakota, and then to Montana where Amund died. He was sort of a travelling evangelist but he did have some churches (Assembly of God). He died from a blood clot after an operation.

843:
After husband’s death, Lydia rented out rooms in Missoula, Montana.

853: SEATTLE
Moved to Seattle because Arthur and Ray were here. They were both married. They moved when WWII started. Lots of work in Seattle, not much in Montana. Lydia bought a small house in Seattle. She cooked at Fredrick & Nelsons; retired when 65. After a couple of years of retirement, she sold her house and rented an apartment.

908: FINNISH ORGANIZATIONS
Not active in any organizations.

915: TRIPS BACK TO FINLAND
Two trips. Many changes. Childhood home gone. First trip back, mother, brothers and sisters still living. Mother lived at brother’s home. She lived to be 80 years old. Second trip, only her brothers’ wives were living. Many improvements in Finland.

986:
She speaks some Finnish. She talks about changes in Finland being similar to changes in America.

1006: FINNISH FOODS
Cooked some Finnish food for her family: some Norwegian also. She made a special kind of brown bread. She'd take a fork and poke holes in the bread (while it was baking) until it was soggy. It was really chewy. Lydia’s children still bake this bread.

1039:
Finnish and Norwegian languages in the home. The eldest son, Arthur can understand some Norwegian and Swedish but doesn’t speak much. They lived
in a Finnish community in Massachusetts when he was a youngster so he spoke Finnish. He hasn't really kept it up.

1064:
During Christmas they had lefse and krumkake (probably because their father was Norwegian). Sometimes they had skorpor, a type of bread similar to rye bread. It's kind of like toast. She also made an oven pancake with lots of eggs and milk. They called it rapsua(?). You pour the batter in round flat pans and bake it fast.

Names and Subjects

**Subject Terms:**
- Confirmation
- Emigration and immigration
- Family--Finland
- Finnish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
- Finnish-Americans--Social life and customs

**Personal Names:**
- Christenson, Amund
- Christenson, Arnold
- Christenson, Enoch
- Christenson, Lydia--Interviews (creator)
- Kerurolaine, Hilma
- Savolainen, Otto
- Christenson, Arthur
- Christenson, Elaine
- Christenson, Ray

**Corporate Names:**
- Assemblies of God

**Family Names:**
- Christenson family
- Kerurolaine family
- Savolainen family

**Geographical Names:**
- Connecticut
- Laukaa (Finland)
- Missoula (Mont.)
- Seattle (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms:**
- Oral histories

**Occupations:**
- Clergy
- Cooks
- Domestics