

# Signe Andres Anderson Kneeland Oral History Interview, 1982

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Kneeland, Signe Andrea Anderson
<b>Title</b>	Signe Andres Anderson Kneeland Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folder 4 photographs 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t210
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Signe Andrea Anderson Kneeland, a Norwegian immigrant.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">Pacific Lutheran University, Archives and Special Collections</a> Archives and Special Collections Pacific Lutheran University 12180 Park Avenue South Tacoma, Washington 98447 Telephone: 253-535-7586 Fax: 253-535-7315 <a href="mailto:archives@plu.edu">archives@plu.edu</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	The oral history collection is open to all users.
<b>Additional Reference Guides</b>	
<b>Languages</b>	English
<b>Sponsor</b>	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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## Biographical Note

Signe Andrea (Anderson) Kneeland was born on June 26, 1889 in Norbostad, on the Rana Fjord in northern Norway. She had three brothers and four sisters, and her parents were Johanna and Johannes Anderson; her father fished in the winter and farmed during the summer. Signe grew up on the farm and went to school in Lavong, a town five miles away. Her mother died around 1899, and Signe immigrated to America without her family when she was thirteen. She reached Trondheim, Norway, on April 1, 1903 and traveled with a woman named Nikoline, who was also on her way to the U.S. They landed on Ellis Island, took the train to Montreal, Canada, and then on to Minnesota. Signe was taken to Irvin (?), MN, where she worked for the Thomas Nilsen family for three years. She was confirmed while in Irvin and went to school for three months when she first arrived in the U.S.

After leaving the Nilsens, Signe did some housekeeping and then got a job in Willmar, MN, in a hotel. She worked for a Danish family, the Fritz Nilsen family, in Atwater, MN, for about six months. She then went back to Willmar, where she worked at Sambo's Restaurant and met Inga Tollefson. They

both worked at Sambo's until it went out of business and then held a few other jobs. They took a train excursion to Washington State in 1910 and decided to stay in Washington because the trees reminded Signe of Norway. After visiting a few friends and relatives in Anacortes, WA and Parkland (Tacoma), WA, Signe got a job in a boarding house and Inga worked for a family in Tacoma. Inga then went to Shelton, WA, where she met the Kneeland family. Signe visited her in Shelton and also met the Kneeland's, and then went to California for four months before returning to Shelton.

By 1911, Inga had married one of the Kneeland's, and Signe worked in Shelton for W.H. Kneeland after Inga married. Signe married Alan Kneeland, a logger who was born in Paten, Maine, in October 1912, four months after they met. Alan and Signe lived in the Shelton area and had four sons: John, Alpheus, George, and Joseph, who died around 1979. Her husband was killed in an accident in 1922 when their youngest child was one and a half; Signe raised her children alone and has lived by herself after his death. She had to learn to drive after Alan died, and she drove children to school for ten years. She moved back into Shelton in 1951 and worked as a custodian in the courthouse for six years until she could start collecting Social Security. She belonged to the Grange and the Democratic Club and visited Norway in 1954. She helped two of her brothers immigrate to the U.S.; Kristen came in 1908 when Signe was working for the Danish family in Minnesota, and her younger brother John came in 1924.

### Lineage

Full Name: Signe Andrea Anderson Kneeland. Maiden Name: Signe Andrea Anderson. Father: Johannes Anderson. Mother: Johanna Anderson. Paternal Grandfather: Kristen Anderson. Paternal Grandmother: Jacobia Anderson. Maternal Grandfather: Sylvester (?). Brothers and Sisters: Kristen Heitmas Anderson, Mathilde Theodora Anderson, Agusta Emelia Anderson, Ursula Anderson, Anders Anderson, Jacobia Anderson, Johannes Anderson. Spouse: Alan Couborn Kneeland. Children: John Couborn Kneeland, Alpheus Anderson Kneeland, George Royal Kneeland, Joseph Sol Kneeland.

## Content Description

The interview was conducted with Signe Kneeland on November 15, 1982. This interview contains information on family history, childhood home, school, church, Christmas traditions, reasons for emigrating, voyage to America, arrival in the U.S., train trip to Minnesota, first impression of the U.S., differences between the U.S. and Norway, work in the U.S., meeting spouse, marriage, children, learning to drive, community involvement, trip to Norway, Norwegian heritage, and helping her brothers immigrate to the U.S. The interview also includes a photograph of Signe Kneeland in transit to California, two photographs reproduced from the local newspaper article "She Came From Norway," and two photographs of Signe at the time of the interview. 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*Tacoma, WashingtonUniversity of Washington Press1993

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## 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	
210, side 1	019: Signe Andrea Anderson Kneeland. Born in Norbostad on the Rana Fjord in northern Norway. She was born on June 22, 1889.
210, side 1	090: PARENTS

Container(s)	Description
	Johannes Anderson and Johanna Sylvester (?) Anderson. They were both from the area where Signe was born. Her father fished in the winter and farmed in the summer.
210, side 1	<p>111: CHILDHOOD HOME</p> <p>Grew up on a farm. Had nine cows and a horse. Raised pigs. Signe raised chickens when she was big enough to do it. Her aunt gave her a hen to get started with. Sometimes they'd pick moltebaer (cloudberries) in the mountains and sell them.</p>
210, side 1	<p>140: BROTHERS AND SISTERS</p> <p>She had three brothers and four sisters. Kristen came to the U.S. and fished in Anacortes, Washington. Anders worked in the ironworks in Mo i Rana, Norway. Johannes, the youngest and twin to Jacobia took the name of the place where they lived in before they moved to Velsvaag. Mathilde got married and stayed in Norway. Augusta, Ursula, and Jacobia stayed in Norway.</p>
210, side 1	<p>236: GRANDPARENTS</p> <p>Paternal, Kristen Anderson was a captain on a boat. He died before Signe was born. Grandmother remarried Andreas Paterson. Captain Anderson died when his children were quite young. Signe remembers her grandmother. She died when Signe was 7. Remembers her step-grandfather too. Maternal grandfather, Sylvester was a carpenter. He and his wife died when their children were young. People didn't lived long in Norway then, especially in the northern part. There were many accidents because people had to travel on the water to get where they were going. It's different now. Signe was there in 1954. Saw that they had roads and trains.</p>
210, side 1	<p>336: CHILDHOOD HOME</p> <p>(See also I-111) Remembers watching over the little chicken she got from her aunt. Had to help with the milking when they took the cows up in the mountains for the summer. Had to bring them to the place where they were milked.</p>
210, side 1	<p>366: SCHOOL</p> <p>Went to school in Lavong, a town five miles away. Had to cross the water. Stayed with a family by the school. Came home on the weekends. Mother stayed home with the younger children. Father was out fishing.</p>
210, side 1	<p>419: CHURCH</p> <p>Had to cross the water to go to church too. Didn't get to church often in the winter, but never missed it in the summer. The minister preached every third Sunday at her church. He had two other churches too. They were taught religion in school too.</p>
210, side 1	<p>435: CHRISTMAS</p> <p>Always had a Christmas tree with candles. Didn't lived on an island, lived on solid land with mountains quite high. River ran through the lower part of</p>

**Container(s)****Description**

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their property. Skied in the winter. Didn't learn to skate. Family had one pair of skates and her brother always used them. For Christmas they would get homemade shoes. Otherwise they'd wear rag shoes in the winter. Never got anything other than shoes. There was a man who would put the soles on and stitch them. Wore wool stockings with rag bottoms in the winter. The other shoes were for church. Had good food on Christmas. Lots of milk, heated up. Signe liked it but some kids didn't. Had only sour milk in the summer. Ate lutefisk. Had a roast and potatoes for Christmas Day. Had a certain kind of soup. Was a sweet soup with plums, figs, and raisins. Signe made it once for a group of men in Tacoma, WA. One man said he liked it. The others ate it but Signe never made it again.

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210, side 1

577:

REASONS FOR EMIGRATING Was only 13 when she left. Hadn't been confirmed yet. Remembers seeing pictures of things from America in her father's illustrated journal. It seemed like Americans only wore white clothes. Could have all the eggs they wanted. Father knew she wanted to go to America. Came home one time and told her that her chance to go was coming. A girl got a ticket from someone in America and she didn't want to go. This was in the summer of 1902. In 1903 she was in America. Signe went to school in the fall of 1902. In March she went to see the parents of the people who'd sent the ticket (Thomas Nilsen and family). They were in Irvin (?), Minnesota. Was confirmed there. Signe's mother had died three years before Signe left Norway. Her father was left with five girls and three boys. Took a couple of days to get from her home in Helgeland to Trondheim. Traveled with a lady, Nikoline who was in her way back to America. Stopped along some of the fjords but couldn't get out of the boat until they got to Bergen.

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210, side 1

653: TRIP TO AMERICA

Father brought her to the boat, which would take her to Nesne. Got to Trondheim on April 1, 1903. Remembers this because a girl tried to play a joke on her. Said she'd dropped her handkerchief. Took a couple of days to get from her home in Helgeland to Trondheim. Traveled with a lady, Nikoline who was in her way back to America. Stopped along some of the fjords but couldn't get out of the boat until they got to Bergen. Signe, who was almost 13, started menstruating while in Bergen. Nikoline wanted to get off the boat for a while. Signe told her that she wasn't feeling well. Nikoline left. Signe started to feel better. Decided to go off the boat. Signe went into Bergen with a Swedish boy and girl. They treated her to everything. Let her do what she wanted. Nikoline was concerned about Signe not feeling well. Came back to the boat early and found Signe missing. Had police looking for her all day. Nikoline was worried she had neglected Signe. It was the other way around. Signe had been having a good time. Signe did the same thing in Liverpool, England. They went to a dance. Signe didn't dance. Just sat there. Got tired of waiting for Nikoline. Went back to the hotel. Another time she said she was going back to the hotel. Nikoline asked if she knew the way. Signe said she did. After walking several blocks, everything looked the same. Finally she saw some Norwegian people. Stopped to ask them the way. Right behind her was Nikoline. She was very

Container(s)	Description
	<p>careful not to let Signe get lost. Had to stay in Liverpool, England for five days. (Problems with the microphone here.) had to wait for the boat to come back from America. Got tired of waiting. Got a ride on a tramper boat, along with many others that were waiting. It was much faster. Took 4 or 5 days to cross the Atlantic. Stopped in Ireland to pick up some girls who worked in America. Ride was rough.</p>
210, side 1	<p>900: ARRIVAL  They were on a Canadian boat. Landed on Ellis Island were put on a Canadian train to Montreal. Had to have \$5 to get their train tickets. Had to bring their luggage through customs. All Signe had was a box. The official didn't open hers. People crowded around to get their train tickets. A man shoved them back. Signe squeezed to the front and got her ticket. Had to find Nikoline. Signe had been sent to the "B" line and Nikoline to the "W" line.</p>
210, side 1	<p>975: TRAIN TRIP  Took the train to Montreal, Canada. Spent a day in Montreal. Took the train down across the prairies. They were selling food on the train. Signe didn't understand the money. She took what she wanted from the basket, gave money to the man, and let him give her the change. Signe was still traveling with Nikoline. She had friends in the place where Signe was going. Landed first in Willmar, Minnesota. Stopped in Havik (?), Minnesota where Nikoline's parents lived. They took Signe to Thomas Nilsen's.</p>
210, side 1	<p>1017: FIRST IMPRESSONS OF THE U.S.  All new to her. The first two years were really good. Got lonesome during the third year for some reason.</p>
210, side 1	<p>1022: WORK  Signe worked on the farm. Signe was supposed to take care of the babies while Mrs. Nilsen worked outside. Signe ended up doing most of the work outside while she took care of her one year old and the newly born baby.</p>
210, side 1	<p>1038: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICA AND NORWAY  Didn't have to travel on water. Used a horse and cart for going to the store. Signe's mother was afraid of the water. Signe wasn't afraid of the water, especially if her father was rowing or sailing.</p>
210, side 1	<p>1051: SCHOOL  (See also I-366) Went to school in America for about three months. Signe didn't learn English until she started working in a hotel. The Nilsen's spoke Norwegian at home. Mrs. Nilsen was from Norway.</p>
210, side 1	<p>1063: TRIPS TO NORWAY</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>Got homesick during her third year in American maybe because she had more responsibility. Didn't get back to Norway until 1954. Sisters were still living and two of her brothers were also living, Kristen and John.</p>
210, side 1	1081:
210, side 2	<p>035: WORK            Learned to bake bread while living with this Danish family. Learned to cook by watching the mother of this family cook. Didn't stay them for more than 6 months. Went back to Willmar, Minnesota. Met Inga Tollefson, a girl working at Sambo's Restaurant. They both worked there until the restaurant went out of business. Signe got a job cooking for another family. Got a job in another Sambo's Restaurant. Signe and Inga heard about a \$25 excursion to Washington State on the train. They decided to homestead in Montana, but they ended up not liking the land there. Worked in a restaurant for a couple of days in order to look over the land. Worked for a man named Moon. They were in Sedro Woolley (probably means Selby), Montana. Took the train to Everett, Washington.</p>
210, side 2	<p>178: WASHINGTON            Decided this was where she wanted to stay. She liked the trees. In Minnesota, she missed the trees that were in Norway. Everett looked more like Norway. She and Inga went to Anacortes, Washington to visit Signe's cousin. Stayed for a couple of nights. Cousin got lice from Norwegian boys who'd just come from Norway. Signe didn't get it. Inga had some friends in Parkland, Washington. Signe and Inga went to visit them. She describes this man and woman, but doesn't remember their names. He may have been a teacher. They were just starting the school there (PLU- 1910?). Inga found work with a family in Tacoma, Washington. Signe worked in some kind of boarding house. Went back to Anacortes to visit her cousin for a while. Inga went to Shelton, Washington. Met the Kneeland's.</p>
210, side 2	<p>302: MEETING SPOUSE            Went to Shelton to visit Inga. Met the Kneeland's. Did housework for the Kneeland's. Went to California for four months. Came back to Shelton. This was still in 1910. By 1911, Inga had married one of the Kneeland boys. Then Signe married one of them. Signe married Alan Kneeland, a logger. Inga was working for W.H. Kneeland in Shelton when she met the Kneeland she married. Signe met Alan at the place where Inga was working. Signe worked for W.H. Kneeland after Inga got married.</p>
210, side 2	<p>394: MARRIAGE            Got married four months after they met. Married in October 1912. Didn't have a wedding. Married by the Justice of the Peace. Signe and Alan lived in a little shack in Shelton, Washington. One of their boys was born there. When he was a year old, they moved five miles up the valley. Had a house there. Lived there for 41 years. Moved to the house she lives in now in 1951. Husband was killed in an accident in 1922; he was 39 years old. Has lived by herself and raised her</p>

Container(s)	Description
	children alone. Had a man help on her place for three months once. Didn't work out. Her youngest child was one and a half when her husband was killed.
210, side 2	457: CHILDREN John, the oldest is retired. He worked with machinery. He and his wife live on the canal. Alpheus was a golf pro until he retired. George is a lawyer in Sun Valley, Idaho. Joe passed away three years ago. Worked the State Department of Labor and Industry.
210, side 2	554: LEARNING TO DRIVE Had to learn after her husband died. She had a Ford. Drove school children for ten years. Drove over the worst roads. Never had any accidents. Came into Shelton in 1951. Worked six years as a custodian, cleaning the courthouse until she got her social security.
210, side 2	612: SCANDINAVIAN ORGANIZATIONS Doesn't belong to any.
210, side 2	626: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS Belonged to the Grange and the Democratic Club. Had to be elected to the work she did for the club. Got people to vote.
210, side 2	666: HOBBIES Likes bird watching.
210, side 2	671: CHURCH Wasn't very active.
210, side 2	674: TRIPS TO NORWAY (See also I-1063) Went to Norway in 1954. Flew to New York. Took the boat to Norway. Flew all the way back. Visited three sisters. Talked on the phone to the sister in Oslo. Norway hadn't changed much then. Is different now than in 1954. Better roads.
210, side 2	713: NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE Married an American. He didn't want her to teach the kids Norwegian. Eldest boy learned "seeladropie" or freshly milked.
210, side 2	730: NORWEGIAN FOOD Husband wanted American food. Didn't learn to cook much in Norway because her mother passed away. Learned to knit and scrub floors while her mother was living.
210, side 2	752: BROTHERS Helped them to come to the U.S. One brother came in 1908 while Signe was working for the Danish people. John, her younger brother, came in 1925. Was



Container(s)	Description
	in Wisconsin until 1927 then came to Washington. They've both passed away. Signe is the only one of eight children living.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Christmas  
 Emigration and immigration  
 Family--Norway  
 Marriage service  
 Norway--Economic conditions  
 Norway--Social conditions--1945-  
 Norwegian-Americans--Ethnic identity  
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs  
 Ocean travel  
 Railroad travel

### Personal Names :

Kneeland, George Royal  
 Kneeland, Joseph Sol  
 Kneeland, Signe Andrea Anderson--Interviews  
 (creator)  
 Nilsen, Fritz  
 Nilsen, Thomas  
 Peterson, Andreas  
 Tollefson, Inga  
 Anderson, Johanna  
 Anderson, Johannes  
 Anderson, Kristen  
 Anderson, Signe Andrea  
 Kneeland, Alan Couborn  
 Kneeland, Alpheus Anderson  
 Kneeland, John Couborn

### Family Names :

Anderson family  
 Kneeland family

### Geographical Names :

Anacortes (Wash.)  
 Atwater (Minn.)  
 Everett (Wash.)  
 Hemnesberget (Norway)  
 Lavong (Norway)  
 Norbostad (Norway)  
 Paten (Maine)  
 Shelton (Wash.)  
 Tacoma (Wash.)  
 Velsvaag (Norway)

Willmar (Minn.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Domestics

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
Â 2004