

Foss Hjarne Oral History Interview, 1982

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Foss, Hjarne
Title	Foss Hjarne Oral History Interview
Dates	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
Quantity	3 file folders 8 photographs 1 sound cassette
Collection Number	t194
Summary	An oral history interview with Hjarne Foss, 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

Hjarne Foss was born on August 29, 1897 in Copenhagen, Denmark. His parents were Carl Peter Foss and Berthe Johanna Christensen, and Hjarne had five siblings: Carl Arnold, Oda, Rigmor, Svend, and Edle. All of the children were baptized and confirmed, but the family did not attend church often. After Hjarne's confirmation in 1911, he got an apprenticeship at an electrical contracting firm, where he learned the trade for five years and then joined the union and stayed at the same company for another five years. By that time, work was slowing down, and Hjarne decided to immigrate to the United States. He stayed with an uncle in Chicago for one month and then moved to Wisconsin, where he obtained factory jobs. In 1923, Hjarne went to Seattle, WA, where his brother worked. In Seattle, Hjarne became employed at the Modern Appliance Co. and worked with Frigidaire refrigerators when they first came onto the market. Hjarne met his first wife, Theresa Pohls, at a Danish church and was married in 1926. Theresa was born in Iowa and raised in St. Andrews, Washington. On January 5, 1928, they had their only child, Helen. The following year, they moved to Solvang, California, where Theresa's father lived, and Hjarne began working in a lumberyard. From there, they moved back to Denmark for a year and a half, and Hjarne worked for the Frigidaire Company in Copenhagen. Upon their return to America, Hjarne worked as an electrical contractor and had his own shop, H.P. Foss Electric Shop. Theresa passed away in late 1960, and five years later, Hjarne took a trip to Denmark with Laura Christiansen,

whose husband, Harald, had died in 1962. Hjarne had been friends with both Laura and Harold, having met them around the same time he met Theresa. Hjarne and Laura were married in 1967 and have since returned to Denmark several more times.

Lineage

Full Name: Hjarne Bernhard Foss. Father: Carl Peter Foss. Mother: Birthe Christensen. Paternal Grandfather: Peter Foss. Brothers and Sisters: Carl Arnold Foss, Oda Foss, Rigmor Foss, Svend Foss, Edle Foss. Spouse: Theresa Pohls, Laura Christiansen. Children: Helen Foss.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Hjarne Foss on October 20, 1982 in Seattle, Washington. It contains information on family background, employment, emigration, marriage and family, and return trips to Denmark. The interview also includes photographs of the Foss family in 1902, Hjarne in 1911, the Foss family in 1912, Hjarne with his sisters in 1918 or 1919, a business card from H.B. Foss Electric Shop in Solvang, California, and Hjarne at the time of the interview. Also see Laura Foss.

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, 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	
194, side 1	021: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Name - Hjarne Bernhard Foss. Born August 29, 1897 in Copenhagen, Denmark.
194, side 1	035: PARENTS Father - Carl Peter Foss. Mother - Berthe Johanna Christensen. His mother was from Copenhagen and his father was from an Island nearby, from a village called Dragoer.
194, side 1	075: Paternal grandparents: Paternal grandmother came from Bornholm Island. Paternal grandfather - Peter Foss. He had been a sailor in his younger days. He was also a painter and painted things that dealt with Danish history. Most of them were from the sea. They talk about one particular picture that Hjarne has that is of the sea battle between Denmark and Sweden.
194, side 1	243: FATHER He was a furniture maker and later became a building carpenter. His mother stayed at home.
194, side 1	260: HOME It was on the outskirts of Copenhagen with a nice garden. Went to school and kept busy. Before 1910, they had lived in an apartment.
194, side 1	300: BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Container(s)	Description
	Carl Arnold came to the US in 1912. Oda, Rigmor, Edle, and Svend stayed in Denmark. Edle was a machinist.
194, side 1	328: VISITS FROM RELATIVES His sister was just here on a visit about a month.
194, side 1	337: Arnold lived in Edmonds, WA and was a building carpenter. He started out as a furniture maker.
194, side 1	367: CHURCH They were baptized and confirmed, but they didn't go to church much. They are more active here. At first they belonged to the Danish church here which was changed to St. John's. Hjarne believes that his father's family was over religious and it worked against him.
194, side 1	425: CHRISTMAS They had a tree with lights. They walked around the tree and sang. They also celebrated the first and second day after Christmas. They would often eat goose and red cabbage. They gave presents.
194, side 1	480: WORK After confirmation in 1911 he worked with a salesman. Then he decided he should learn a trade. He went to an electrical contracting firm and they arranged for him to learn the trade and get paid a little. This was in 1912 and electricity was fairly new and was a growing industry with a future. They got lots of work all over the city. In 1917, he finished his apprenticeship, joined the union and stayed working with the same company. It was Bernhard Hansen Electrical Company, which was originally Britch (?) Petersen and Co.
194, side 1	625: ELECTRICAL JOBS Worked for five years until he came to the US. He talks about a castle that he wired on the island of Fyn. This was in 1919 and in 1947 he went back and visited there.
194, side 1	708: REASONS FOR COMING TO AMERICA In 1921 work was getting slow. His sister and her husband were in Berlin, Germany and Hjarne went down to visit to see if he could get work, but there wasn't any so he returned. He decided to visit his brother in the US. He also had an uncle Christian Christiansen in Chicago.
194, side 1	784: TRIP TO U.S. He sailed on a Danish liner directly from Copenhagen to New York. He traveled 3rd class. He went through Ellis Island. This was in June 1922. He couldn't speak English but he could speak German. Language was no problem. He went right to Chicago.

Container(s)	Description
194, side 1	812: CHICAGO Stayed with is uncle and his two children for about one month. Through a friend of his uncle he went to Beloit, Wisconsin.
194, side 1	830: WISCONSIN Got a job in a big factory. He stayed there until the spring of 1923. In Beloit, he stayed in a boarding house and in Milwaukee he stayed with a private family. He would take the streetcar to work.
194, side 1	866: WEST COAST He came by train in March of 1923. By now he had picked up the language. He had taken a few evening classes. He stayed with his brother who worked in Seattle and came home only on weekends. He worked for Seattle transit in the streetcar shop. They stayed at Georgetown, which was a rooming house. Hjarne couldn't find work. He took a few odd jobs.
194, side 1	930: DANISH CHURCH Met some young people who went to this church. Soon the minister was also looking for a job for Hjarne. He got him a temporary job as an office janitor for the Modern Appliance Company, which distributed Delco Light, which made generators.
194, side 1	1023: WORK Hjarne got acquainted with the serviceman there. Hjarne told him that he was also an electrician. This man told the boss. At this time, Frigidaire came out and changed the whole company. McBride, the serviceman, learned about Frigidaire and took over. Hjarne worked with him. The business expanded very quickly
194, side 1	1095: MEETING SPOUSE Young people would meet at the church. This is where he met his first wife Theresa Pohls. He also knew Laura (his present wife) and Harald her husband. Theresa was born in Iowa and raised in eastern Washington at St. Andrews, Washington. Her dad was a farmer there who later moved to Seattle. Theresa did housework.
194, side 1	1135: WEDDING 1926 in Enumclaw, Washington.
194, side 2	013: WEDDING They were married in the Danish Church in Enumclaw by Pastor Neilsen.
194, side 2	026: SISTER ODA

Container(s)	Description
	She came to the US for a few years. She attended the wedding. She worked in Seattle for a while and returned to Denmark in 1927. She died right after childbirth when she was 34.
194, side 2	062: HONEYMOON There was no money for things like that. It came in 1930 when they took a trip to Denmark. They had a daughter Helen then.
194, side 2	080: After they were married they lived in Seattle in a rented place. In 1927 he was transferred to Tacoma, Washington to take care of the service department there. They were busy and there was about fifteen people working there. They did a lot of apartment work.
194, side 2	140: OLD REFRIGERATORS In the apartments they would have a motor in the basement which ran the refrigerators in all the rooms.
194, side 2	162: SEATTLE In 1928 they were transferred back to Seattle. In the meantime their daughter had been born in Tacoma. By then there were seventy men working in the service department in Seattle. In 1929, they started distributing to dealers who took care of their own service needs. Hjarne was out of work so they decided to go to Denmark, but stopped first to visit his wife's father in Solvang, California.
194, side 2	242: SOLVANG It started as a Danish community in 1911. His wife's father moved there in 1927. They left Seattle in November in 1929 and stayed down there for the winter. Hjarne got a job in the lumberyard.
194, side 2	268: VISIT TO DENMARK Left in March of 1930. They went by train from California to New York and by ship to Copenhagen. They traveled 2nd class. Citizenship: Got it in 1929. Had to study for it. It was no problem.
194, side 2	283: He went to school for it at the older Parkway (?) High School.
194, side 2	307: DENMARK His mother was very sick and died that summer. While he was there he got a job with the Frigidaire Company in Copenhagen. They stayed there for about 1.5 years. You could only keep your citizenship for two years if you were out of the country.
194, side 2	350: DEPRESSION

Container(s)	Description
	<p>When he came back the depression was bad (1931). They returned to California and then went to Seattle to see how things were. Everyone was out of work so they went back to California. That had a little money left so they started building a house. He still couldn't find a steady job. Eventually he started as an electrical contractor and had his own shop. He called it H.P. Foss Electrical Shop. They had a store too and carried the Hot Point Line. His work was mostly for new homes. There was a lot of trust and honesty in those days. He also tells of other contracting work he did in California.</p>
194, side 2	<p>502: STORE In 1951, he sold out and worked just with the electrical work.</p>
194, side 2	<p>519: ORGANIZATIONS Belonged to the Danish Brotherhood in Solvang, CA. He also belongs in Seattle and has been a member for fifty-seven years. They also belonged to the church in Solvang, California.</p>
194, side 2	<p>548: SOLVANG, CALIFORNIA They talk about the changes there. It has become too commercial and there are too many tourists. There are hundreds of real estate people.</p>
194, side 2	<p>610: DAUGHTER She took a trip to Denmark in 1951 with a group of young people. They toured England and Paris by bicycle and then she went to Copenhagen, Denmark to visit. She returned to Los Angeles via the Panama Canal by ship. She met a Danish boy on the ship and they were married. His name was Preben Staar (?). They went to Denmark to live. His family was in the glass business.</p>
194, side 2	<p>670: VISITS TO DENMARK In 1953, his daughter had a son and they went over for his baptism. They went by ship from Los Angeles, through the Panama Canal to Denmark. They stayed for the summer. In 1955, his wife went over and visited. In 1956, his daughter divorced and she and her son returned to the US.</p>
194, side 2	<p>725: LANGUAGE Everyone in their family speaks Danish but they didn't speak much Danish in the home.</p>
194, side 2	<p>750: FIRST WIFE Late 1960 she passed away. He was alone for seven years. He took a couple of trips to Denmark. He retired in 1962 at 65.</p>
194, side 2	<p>770: TRIPS TO DENMARK Went in 1962 and in 1965.</p>
194, side 2	<p>775: SECOND WIFE</p>

Container(s)	Description
	Laura. They went to Denmark together in 1965. Her husband had died in 1962. They were married in Seattle and he gave his home in Solvang to his daughter. This was in 1967.
194, side 2	838: TRIPS TO DENMARK They returned in 1965 and 1969. In 1969, they sailed on a Swedish freighter from Seattle to Copenhagen. There were only eight passengers on the way over. He has been on Danish freighters. Now they don't take passengers anymore. They sailed along the coast and made stops all along the coast. In Panama and in several points in Europe where they were doing business. On their return they got on in Sweden after a visit with their niece in Gøteborg. He flew over in 1965, but he didn't like it that well and went back by ship. It was about \$1500 round trip on the freighter. In 1972, they flew to Denmark.
194, side 2	957: OTHER TRIPS In 1973, they took a trip by ship from Tacoma down through the Panama Canal, down along the coast of South America and back up the other side and back to Tacoma. It took about two months.
194, side 2	985: Talks some about the climate in Denmark. It is a little bit colder than here.
194, side 2	1020: SPOKEN DANISH He says a few words.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas

Denmark -- Social conditions -- 1945-

Depressions -- 1929

Emigration and immigration

Marriage service

Scandinavian-Americans--Interviews

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

Personal Names :

Foss, Hjarne--Interviews

(creator)

Christensen, Birthe

Christiansen, Laura

Foss, Carl Peter

Foss, Helen

Pohls, Theresa

Corporate Names :

Danish Brotherhood (Solvang, Calif.)

Danish Club (Enumclaw, Wash.)

Ellis Island (N.J. and N.Y.)

Family Names :

Christensen family

Foss family

Pohls family

Geographical Names :

Beloit (Wis.)

Chicago (Ill.)

Copenhagen (Denmark)

Enumclaw (Wash.)

Seattle (Wash.)

Solvang (Calif.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Electricians

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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