

Ole Andreas Nissen Oral History Interview, 1982

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Nissen, Ole Andreas Nissen
Title	Ole Andreas Nissen Oral History Interview
Dates	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
Quantity	4 photographs 3 file folders 2 sound cassettes
Collection Number	t135-136
Summary	An oral history interview with Ole Andreas Nissen, 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

Ole Nissen was born on January 22, 1887 in Ansager, Denmark to Christian Peder Nissen and Sophia Christiana Sorensen. Ole's father had a chemistry business and passed away when Ole was only three and half, leaving Ole's brother Nis to support the family. Ole also had three older sisters, Nikolina, Kristina, and Sina. The family lived on a farm, and Ole stayed at home to help his mother until he was eight years old and then attended school. After he finished school, Ole's mother told him that she wanted him to become a tailor, and he got an apprenticeship with a tailor in a nearby town for the following three and half years. Ole learned the entire profession of men's clothing and worked in small towns around Ansager until he had enough money to immigrate to America. Nis had immigrated in 1903, and when he came home to visit in 1907, he took Ole and Nikolina back with him. They stopped in Milbank, South Dakota first to help an acquaintance of Nis's build a house, and there, Nikolina began working for the sawmill owner's family. She eventually moved to Santa Cruz, CA with them, and Ole and Nis went to Seattle, WA for awhile before moving to San Francisco, CA. A big earthquake had struck the year before, and work was hard to come by. Nevertheless, Ole eventually found tailoring

work in various California cities. In 1910, Ole's mother immigrated to Vancouver, British Columbia, and Ole and his sister went to live with her. They remained there for four years, during which time, Ole learned how to make women's clothing. In 1914, the family moved to Seattle, and Ole opened his own shop in their home. He soon established a large clientele, which included the wives of several prosperous Seattle bankers. In 1924, Ole married Kathryn Hendrickson, who was from Deer Lodge, Montana. Ole met her through her cousin, who was a vest maker. Ole and Kathryn had one daughter, Marilyn. In 1925, Ole was able to open his own shop on 28th and East Madison and worked there until 1967. He has never returned to Denmark, but still speaks Danish.

Lineage

Full Name: Ole Andreas Nissen. Father: Christian Peder Nissen. Mother: Sophia Christiana Sorensen. Maternal Grandmother: Søren Hansen. Brothers and Sisters: Nis Nissen, Peder Nissen, Nikolina Nissen, Kristina Nissen, Sina Nissen, Spouse: Kathryn Hendrickson. Children: Marilyn Adele Nissen Leren.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Ole Nissen on January 21, 1982 in Seattle, Washington. It contains information about family background, the tailoring business, emigration, settling in, marriage, and family. The interview also includes two photographs of Ole at his tailor shop, a photograph of Ole and his family in 1971, two snapshots of Ole at the time of the interview, and an article about Ole receiving his 50-year emblem from the Danish Brotherhood. 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

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

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<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv77979>

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	
135, side 1	020: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Name - Ole Andreas Nissen. Born in Ansager, Denmark, which is in the west part of Jutland close of Esbjerg and Varde.
135, side 1	050: PARENTS Father went into the area and built a home. This was a farming area where they raised grains, buckwheat and barley. They raised everything but wheat. There was a watermill in town where the farmers took their grain. They were very self-sufficient. Father's name was Christian Peder Nissen. He came from Schleswig area, which is close to the German border. He had a chemistry business. Mother, Sophia Christiana Sorensen. She came from around Ansager. Ole was born 22 January 1887.
135, side 1	165: BROTHERS AND SISTERS The first three died at 1 year. (See counter I-270 and I-460)
135, side 1	185: PASTORS IN A SMALL TOWN Just like a king. Everything that happened with the family had to be reported to him. (see counter I-270).
135, side 1	210: COUNTY COUNCIL Used to meet at his father's place for a number of years. Then another family by the name of Nissen moved to town and bought the inn and told the county

Container(s)	Description
	council that they should meet there. In those days, they used liquor regularly, but not an over...
135, side 1	245: amount because they only allowed so much. In this business they had a long counter were people came. The men were treated with "kaffeepunch" which was a schnapps glass full of brandy and a cup of coffee. The women got a glass of wine and cookies. Father had a number of people who worked for him and he took care of the business end himself.
135, side 1	270: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Preacher came and told them they had to pray to the Almighty that this child wouldn't die like the others. This child, Nis Peder Nissen survived. As a result he was to study to become a preacher, but then this changed. One time when they were going to Varde to buy supplies the father became ill. Father had a special soup that he used for a cure-all. This soup was made from homemade beer and rye bread. Made a big batch of beer every fall for the harvest season. The soup didn't work this time and he passed away. Ole was 3 1/2 years old then. Now Nis his brother would have to work to support the family.
135, side 1	410: BROTHER NIS' JOB Worked at a creamery with his mother, but he quit. He worked at almost any kind of place. Then he went down to Schleswig, Germany where they had many relatives, but he was not allowed to stay there unless he lived with a German family. This was because he was Danish. He left there and went to Hamburg, Germany and then he traveled around. He was sent home in 1898.
135, side 1	460: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Had a sister two years younger than Nis and another sister who fell down the stairs and died. They were Nikolina, Kristina, and Sina. Ole was the youngest.
135, side 1	482: EMIGRATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS Nis had traveling experience in Germany and he came to the US in 1903. He was in New York for five years, where he learned to be a cabinetmaker. After five years he returned to Denmark to visit his mother. Then Ole and his oldest sister went back to New York with him in 1907. They saw all the sights.
135, side 1	523: REASONS FOR GOING TO THE MID-WEST Nis had a partner who had a brother who lived out in the Black Hills in Dakota who needed a house built. They all went to Dakota.
135, side 1	545: SCHOOL DAYS IN DENMARK Went to school from age 7 to 14. In the wintertime, they had regular school and in the summer they had vacation time.
135, side 1	570: CHRISTMAS TIME IN DENMARK

Container(s)	Description
	They were the only ones in their family that had a Christmas tree.
135, side 1	<p>575: CHILDHOOD AND FARM</p> <p>Father had 20 acres which was bordered by two rivers. Then his father bought 20 acres on the other side of the river where he used to have to take the cows in the morning. He stayed at home and helped his mother until he was 8. After breakfast and the milking he would hitch the cows together and take them across the river and tie them in place. If he wasn't looking after the cows he had to look after the young cattle and the sheep which were also on ropes. They milked their cows three times a day.</p>
135, side 1	<p>635:</p> <p>Mother made butter to sell. She sold it to the man with the inn (he also had a grocery store). People would ask for her butter, she had a good reputation as a butter maker.</p>
135, side 1	<p>647: FATHER</p> <p>He recalls his father who would set him on his lap and sing a sailor song. He sings the sailor song in Danish. It was a popular song, which he has heard in Vancouver, BC at the Danish Club there. He translates - a sailor suffers more evil than good.</p>
135, side 1	<p>710: MATERNAL GRANDFATHER</p> <p>Hit Ole with an apple. He was Soren Hansen. Apple trees were very scarce in Denmark. This was grain land and they had to buy the supplies they needed.</p>
135, side 1	<p>758: WORK</p> <p>When he was 9-13 he worked for the summers with his mother on the farm. Then she told him she wanted him to become a tailor. She decided this because he had such small wrists, those weren't the wrists of a farmer.</p>
135, side 1	<p>780: APPRENTICESHIP</p> <p>With the tailor in the next town for 3 1/2 years. Liked after he started. This was in a private home. Had a store below it. He was the serviceman besides learning to be a tailor, had to run all the errands, help his wife in the kitchen, keep the stoves all burning, etc. The first years he did only pants, the second vests, and the third year coats, and the final half-year the finishing off of the completed garment. Had learned the entire profession in men's clothing. He learned about women's later.</p>
135, side 1	<p>824: TAILORING IN DENMARK</p> <p>Went to work in small towns around Ansager. Earned enough money to come to the US.</p>
135, side 1	833: REASONS FOR EMIGRATION

Container(s)	Description
	Very curious about things over here - Indians. His brother was back for a visit and took Ole and his sister back to the US.
135, side 1	847: TRIP TO U.S. Left 28 May 1907 from Esbjerg and went to England. Cousin Martin Jensen came too. Martin had been sailing before. Ole had never been on the water so they teased him, but it was Martin who got seasick. The North Sea was rough. Went to Liverpool, England and then they got on a new steamer called "The Baltic". They stopped in Ireland and took on passengers.
135, side 1	911: BOAT TRIP Lots of young people. Dancing. Took 708 days across the Atlantic. It was an enjoyable trip.
135, side 1	932: ELLIS ISLAND They checked him over. He had to have \$25 dollars. He got this from his brother. Brother helped them out a lot because he spoke English.
135, side 1	955: SIGHTSEEING IN NEW YORK Had to see all the places where his brother had been. They went out to Coney Island. It was so crowded that they could hardly get to the water. Everything was exciting. Curious about many things - Indians and California.
135, side 1	983: Saw first black man, first Indian and first Chinaman.
135, side 1	1008: BLACK HILLS, DAKOTA Brother had to go out to meet his friend so they left New York. They took a train to Chicago, Illinois. Martin, the cousin left the group to visit his uncle in Minnesota. (see counter I-1075).
135, side 1	1025: TRAIN TRIP Very interesting. He had never been on a train before.
135, side 1	1033: MOTHER'S FEELINGS ON HIS EMIGRATION She had no objections. She wrote that she would like to come over too if someone would come over and get her. Nis went home and got her. They came home through Canada because his mother was 67 and the US wouldn't accept anyone here of that age unless they had a permanent person to take care of her. She came to Vancouver, BC in 1910. Ole and his sister went up to Vancouver and stayed for four years.
135, side 1	1075: TRAIN TRIP Transferred trains in Chicago to go the Black Hills in the Dakotas. Stopped at Milbank, South Dakota. His sister got a job working for the sawmill owner's

Container(s)	Description
	family. When this family moved to Santa Cruz, California she went with them. She was a dressmaker by trade. She had had a shop in Denmark.
135, side 1	1102: PEEVER, SOUTH DAKOTA Worked as a handyman, cook around the house for the man his brother was working for.
135, side 1	1116: INDIANS Had a summer picnic for the 4th of July. Indians were invited from Minnesota and Iowa and all the surrounding states. A multitude of people.
135, side 2	029: INDIAN PICNIC Had drummers playing in the Indian section. There was another section for the American where they were doing square dances. This was near Peever, South Dakota. Talks about this being a dry state and the bootleggers in the hills.
135, side 2	135: Went back to Minneapolis.
135, side 2	139: Got on the work train to Pasco, Washington. Then they took the train down to Portland where they were building a depot. Ole went as a carpenter's helper. This way their train trip was free. Stayed there for about three weeks.
135, side 2	177: SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 1907 Brother felt sorry for him because he had to do such hard work so they went to Seattle. Worked for a tailor for awhile but tailor work was slow at that time.
135, side 2	200: CALIFORNIA Took a sailboat to San Francisco from Seattle. It took 2 1/2 days. This was 1907, the year after the big earthquake. The people were very poor because of this. There were many people out of work, the town was all broken up. Market Street was all broken up. He was out of work for quite awhile.
135, side 2	250: NICKEL BEER Could get a glass of beer (schooner) for 5 cents at noon and then there were free snacks to go along with it. They would search for the places where they could get the most food.
135, side 2	270: GOLDEN GATE AVENUE There used to be streams of people two blocks long waiting to use the toilet there.
135, side 2	290: TAILOR WORK Found work with a tailor for about a week and a half.

Container(s)	Description
135, side 2	<p>311: CAFETERIA WORK</p> <p>Decided to get a job where he could get something to eat. This was down by the ferry building on Market Street. It was called "Alameda Cafe" (?). This was owned by a Dane. He was a waiter. This man taught him how to be a waiter. Got \$12 a week. Worked there for 6 months.</p>
135, side 2	<p>407: HOUSING</p> <p>He and his brother had a room in the gentlemen's district in San Francisco, which they had put up for the time being (hard time). There were 20 sleeping rooms and one toilet.</p>
135, side 2	<p>435: TAILOR WORK</p> <p>Saw an ad in the paper that a coat maker was needed in Selma which is near Fresno, California. Worked in Selma for one year. He was paid by the coat - \$9. Two and a quarter would be one week's wages. A tailor from Eureka in Humbolt, California came down to visit and persuaded Ole to get out the heat and go back with him. Stayed there for one year.</p>
135, side 2	<p>515: NOVEL EXPERIENCES</p> <p>Danish church in Selma, the minister's wife got him to sing in the choir. Went to Ferndale, California and a preacher came and invited him to sing in his choir. Sang alto. Talks about the Redwood Forest.</p>
135, side 2	<p>605: DANISH BROTHERHOOD</p> <p>Joined in 1908 in Selma, California. Joined because his brother belonged to it and because of the benefits. Made a lot of friends. Took part in everything.</p>
135, side 2	<p>650:</p> <p>After Ferndale, California he went down to visit his sister in Santa Cruz, California who was working with that same family. Ole went down after her because of the fact that his brother was in Denmark bringing back their mother. They took a boat from San Francisco to Seattle, Washington. Stayed in Seattle until he got the letter from his brother in Vancouver, BC that he and his mother were there.</p>
135, side 2	<p>700: WENT TO SEE HIS MOTHER IN VANCOUVER, B.C.</p> <p>Set up housekeeping in Vancouver where they lived for four years. This was a very good town for tailoring. Worked for J.C. Morgan. This is where he got to learn to make ladies clothing. Used this training in his business in Seattle. The Ladies clothier left and Ole went with him (Whitterman?). They made both ladies and men's' clothing. He stayed with him for about one year.</p>
135, side 2	<p>777: SEATTLE, WASH.</p> <p>Wanted to get back to the states. Liked Seattle's climate and friendly people.</p>
135, side 2	<p>790: RETURNING TO THE U.S.</p>

Container(s)	Description
	Went to the American Consul to see about returning to the US. They explained that they had moved to Canada for their mother's sake. Ole had enough money and was put in charge of his mother so that they could all come down. (1914).
135, side 2	824: SEATTLE Their first home was on Lake Washington Blvd.
135, side 2	840: WORK The neighbor came in and told him that they needed a tailor in that part of town and that he should set up his business in the house. This man gave him a coat to work and then he got some free advertising.
135, side 2	883: OPENED A SHOP IN HIS HOME Started building up a clientele with the neighbors. The first suit he made was for \$29, after that he didn't charge less than \$35.
135, side 2	897: DANISH BROTHERHOOD Once a month they would play cards (whist). One time he played with the vice-president of the Washington Mutual Bank. He asked Ole to make a suit for his wife. The bankers had a meeting every month in which the wives went too. This lady he made the suit for talked to the head of the Sea-First Bank (the richest banker in town at that time). This man's wife became a 25-year customer.
135, side 2	932: He mentions the names of his customers, Andrew Price's and Joshua Green's wives. He had four banker's wives he was making clothes for. They introduced him to senator's, governor's, and mayor's wives.
135, side 2	955: IN THE SHOP He did all the ladies work. With the men's work he would cut it and fit it and sent it out to other coat makers. His sister helped him in the shop and he did have some coat makers for awhile.
135, side 2	970: NEW SHOP Bought a lot on 28th and Madison. Moved the house that was there to the back and built two stores in the front. Rented out one store.
135, side 2	993: FUEL Used coal and wood for heat. Had a half basement under each store, which they used for storage of these fuels.
135, side 2	1015: The other shop he rented out to a barbershop and a beauty parlor.
135, side 2	1020: TAILOR STORE

Container(s)	Description
	Up-to-date and modern. Had his name on the front of the shop. Worked there from 1925-1967. He retired at about 80.
135, side 2	1071: WIFE Met her in Seattle, Washington. His wife's cousin was a vest maker who made some vests for Ole. That was how they met. Her name was Kathryn Hendrickson. She was from Montana. Asked her out to a dance the first weekend she was here at the Danish Brotherhood. Married in September 1, 1924.
135, side 2	1125: WEDDING Supposed to have a double wedding, but the other couple got married sooner.
136, side 1	005: MINISTER Met a pastor in Ferndale, California, who knew a pastor they knew in Seattle because they had studied in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Ole was the best man for the Seattle pastor's wedding. This is who they were supposed to have the double wedding with.
136, side 1	070: WEDDING Katy's wedding dress. Wore a regular dress. In the Danish Church. Alfred and Marie were the witnesses. A cat came in and disturbed the wedding party. No wedding party afterwards. Went to Tacoma, Washington and Olympia, Washington for their honeymoon. Stayed at a hotel. Took the train.
136, side 1	225: HOUSE Had already purchased a home, which was not finished. There was another house in the back of the lot that they rented out. They fixed up the homes and stayed there for 20 years. His mother stayed in the house, which was by the tailor shop.
136, side 1	299: LANGUAGE PROBLEMS His mother couldn't speak English. She would come to the shop and talk to him.
136, side 1	308: CHILDREN Marilyn married Loren Leren in 1952. He is a carpenter. They have three children, son, 29 helps his father and does mechanical work and has a child seven years old, Cheryl is 26 and the youngest is 19.
136, side 1	355: Hasn't returned to Denmark. Still speaks Danish. Talks about the differences between the language from the city to the country.
136, side 1	387:

Container(s)	Description
	During the vacation time in the summer in Denmark, the children from the cities would go out the country. It took them awhile to get adjusted to the language differences.
136, side 1	404: WIFE Born in Deer Lodge, Montana. Her father came from Denmark and settled in Iowa where they were many Mormons. He went with them out to Salt Lake City, Utah and became a Mormon priest. Several of the priests there grouped together and took a stand against the head of the Mormons because he had so many wives (30). He was chased out of the valley and moved to Montana. Ole's wife wasn't a Mormon.
136, side 1	460 : CHURCH LIFE Didn't attend church.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas
 Danish-Americans--Interviews
 Danish-Americans--Northwest,Pacific--Social life and customs
 Emigration and immigration
 Marriage service
 Ocean travel
 Railroad travel

Personal Names :

Hendrickson, Kathryn
 Leren, Marilyn Adele Nissen
 Nissen, Nis
 Nissen, Sina
 Sørensen, Sophia Christiana
 Nissen, Christian Peder
 Nissen, Kristina
 Nissen, Nikolina
 Nissen, Ole Andreas Nissen--Interviews
 (creator)

Corporate Names :

Baltic (Steamship)
 Danish Brotherhood in America (Selma, Calif.)
 Danish Brotherhood in America. Lodge 29 (Seattle, Wash.)
 Ellis Island (N.J. and N.Y.)

Family Names :

Hendrickson family
 Leren family
 Nissen family
 Sørensen family

Geographical Names :

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Ansager (Denmark)
Milbank (S.D.)
San Francisco (Calif.)
Seattle (Wash.)
Vancouver (B.C.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Farmers

Tailors

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004