

Frederick Christensen Madsen Oral History Interview, 1982

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Madsen, Frederik Christensen
Title	Frederick Christensen Madsen Oral History Interview
Dates	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
Quantity	2 file folders 2 sound cassettes
Collection Number	t296-297
Summary	An oral history interview with Frederik Christensen Madsen, 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	Danish
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

Fred Madsen was born on November 9, 1904 in Brainerd, Minnesota to Peter Christensen Madsen and Agnes Wendelbo Nielsen Madsen. Both of Fred's parents were born in Denmark, and his father owned a dairy and milk route in Brainerd. When Fred's father had earned enough money to return to Denmark to buy a home in 1912, he moved the family to a little place near the town of Hygum. At this time, there were five children in the family, including Fred, and they attended private school for their first three months in Denmark in order to become better acquainted with the Danish language. Fred's youngest sister, Marie, was born in Denmark. Fred's mother never liked living in Denmark, however, and during WWI, the family bought tickets back to America. Fred and his father returned first in 1922 to see how times were in America. Fred wanted to stay in Denmark, where he had become involved with Danish folk high -schools, but if he would have stayed for a half a year longer, he would have had to register for the Danish draft, and his father did not want that to happen. Fred and his father went to Chicago first, where Fred's aunt and uncle lived. There, Fred quickly became employed on the John Deere estate. After one year, the rest of the family moved to America, and Fred's father bought a farm in New York. Fred then quit his job and moved to New York to live with his family. He worked

on the farm, at a creamery, and for the highway department, but in the winter, he, his brother, and a friend went to a folk high school in Nysted, Nebraska. The school was closely related to the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and they did a lot of singing, listened to Danish and American lectures, and studied the American language. Fred also attended folk schools in Tyler, MN and Solvang, CA. In Solvang, he met his wife, Esther Larsen, and was married in 1938. At this time, Fred had been gold mining for a couple of years, and had bought a bulldozer and land in Nevada. He continued to gold mine until WWII, and then moved to western Washington. In Washington, Fred and Esther became the caretakers of Lutherland for several years, helped different church groups get their camps set up, and then Fred began a heavy equipment business called F.C. Madsen and Son. He and Esther have two sons, Peter and Dana. Peter has a degree in chemistry, and Dana, being interested in his father's equipment, earned a degree in engineering and business administration. Fred has returned to Denmark in 1972 and 1980 and is very proud of his Danish heritage. He still attends folk meetings and is a member of the Danish Brotherhood, the Danish American Heritage Society, the Nordic Heritage Museum, the Rebild National Park Society, and Harmonien and serves on the board of directors of the Northwest Danish Home in Seattle.

Lineage

Full Name: Frederik Christensen Madsen. Father: Peter Christensen. Madsen Mother: Agnes Wendelbo Nielsen Madsen. Paternal Grandfather: Steffen Madsen. Paternal Grandmother: Thomasine Kristine Grønberg Madsen. Maternal Grandfather: Niels Christian Nielsen. Maternal Grandmother: Katherine Marie Wilhelmine Wendelbo Nielsen. Brothers and Sisters: Christine Wilhelmine Madsen, Harold Christensen Madsen, Alfred Marius Madsen, Marie Katherine Madsen, Clarence Joachim Madsen. Spouse: Esther Larsen Madsen. Children: Peter Frederik Sleiborg Madsen, Mark Christian Sleiborg Madsen, Alfred Dana Sleiborg Madsen.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Fred Madsen on October 21, 1982 in Enumclaw, Washington. It provides information on family background, emigration to Denmark, Danish folk schools, return to America, occupations, marriage and family, community involvement, and Danish heritage. The interview also includes a letter from Fred, explaining the various organizations he is a part of. 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 Morrene Nesvig 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	
196, side 1	025: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Full name: Frederik Christensen Madsen. Born November 9, 1904 in Brainerd, Minnesota.
196, side 1	044: PARENTS Father - Peter Christensen Madsen. Mother - Agnes Wendelbo Nielsen Madsen. His father had his own dairy and milk route in Brainerd, Minnesota. He was the first one in the area to use bottles. He was born in Denmark and had to start working for a farmer before he was confirmed. He was born in a house northwest of the town of Vejle, Denmark. He came to America about 1890. His mother was born between Vejle and Horsens Aarhus, Denmark.
196, side 1	185: GRANDPARENTS

Container(s)	Description
	Maternal grandfather was a weaver. Paternal grandmother passed away while they were in Denmark. Paternal grandfather worked with a type of lathe. He died of cancer.
196, side 1	255: RETURN TO DENMARK His father sold his dairy business because he had enough money and wanted to go back to Denmark and buy a place. This was his intention from the beginning. His father met his mother in Canada. She had come over to a brother when she was 14 so that there would be one less mouth to feed in her home in Denmark. They returned in 1912 to a little place north of Vejle near the town of Hygum, Denmark.
196, side 1	320: REASONS FOR RETURNING TO AMERICA His mother never did like it in Denmark and wanted to get back to America. They sold the place and bought tickets to get back to America. This was during the war. (See counter I-438).
196, side 1	335: REACTION TO MOVE TO DENMARK He knew Danish when he was a child but when he had gone to school in Brainerd, Minnesota he had learned English and they switched to using English in the home to help them. He had forgotten his Danish. They went to a private school where the teacher could speak English for the first three months and then to the regular school.
196, side 1	390: DENMARK They were in southeastern part of Jutland. It was good fertile land. The land used to belong to an estate and there were estates on either side.
196, side 1	438: RETURN TO AMERICA They were almost ready to go when all the kids got put into the hospital with Diphtheria. His little sister died.
196, side 1	490: WWI They couldn't get coal in Denmark so his father bought a peat bog. They dug peat, which was then dried and used instead of coal. His father had a contract with a weaving factory. He hired some to work for him.
196, side 1	517: DIPHTHERIA His sister caught it from a girl at school. Their home was quarantined. They were taken to the hospital.
196, side 1	550: LIFE IN DENMARK They had a lot of fun playing with their cousins. They had a lot of chores, milking, picking stones, and other things. They ate pumpnickel bread, and white bread was special. His mother made pancakes and buttermilk soup.

Container(s)	Description
196, side 1	<p>620: CHRISTMAS IN DENMARK</p> <p>His parents decorated the tree in the parlor. After supper, they sang and danced around the tree and then opened their presents. This was on Christmas Eve.</p>
196, side 1	<p>640: CONFIRMATION IN DENMARK</p> <p>It was very important. After you were confirmed you got long pants and a suit and the girls got special dresses. Afterwards there was a big feast at the house with all relatives. He was confirmed in Jelling in the church under which the bones of the first king and queen of Denmark are buried.</p>
196, side 1	<p>685: MADSEN NAME</p> <p>Mads is a man's name and the sen stands for son. It has remained the same.</p>
196, side 1	<p>707: RETURN TO THE U.S.</p> <p>He would have liked to have stayed in Denmark but his father and mother decided to return to the US. They weren't sure how times were in the US so Fred and his father came to the US first in 1922.</p>
196, side 1	<p>720: WORK</p> <p>Fred had worked for farmers for two winters.</p>
196, side 1	<p>730: FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS</p> <p>They were 'schools for life.' There were no grades. The people he worked for used the customs that they had learned in this school. Every morning, before work, they sang. They also sang in the evening and after that the owner would read to them. Since Germany had taken part of Denmark away they had to do something internally to make up for the loss and this is what they did. Grundtvig and another man were the instigators of these schools. There were four Danish American folk high schools in the US and Fred attended three of them. He felt that this led to a good life and he wanted to stay in Denmark and be like the people he worked for.</p>
196, side 1	<p>795: REASONS FRED HAD TO LEAVE DENMARK</p> <p>His father wouldn't let him stay because if he stayed a half a year longer he would have to register for the Danish draft even though he was a US citizen. He would have a year in training then.</p>
196, side 1	<p>810: TRAVEL TO U.S.</p> <p>This was to be a permanent move. They came over on the Scandinavian American Line's ship Frederick VIII. It sailed from Copenhagen to New York with one stop in Oslo, Norway. From New York, they went to Chicago where they were met by Fred's aunt and uncle.</p>
196, side 1	<p>842: WORK</p>

Container(s)	Description
	He went to the Scandinavian American Employment Agency and got a job right away. People knew that Danes were good workers. He was working on the estate of the millionaire (John) Deere who is connected with farm machinery by the same name.
196, side 1	855: LANGUAGE He could speak enough English to get along. He brushed up by reading Jack London's "The Call of the Wild."
196, side 1	873: IMPRESSIONS OF AMERICA It was different and he longed for Denmark to begin with.
196, side 1	885: WORK In Denmark it was an honor to be able to keep up with the #1 man on the farm. You strove to work hard to keep up with him.
196, side 1	900: LAKE VILLA, ILLINOIS There weren't many Scandinavians in the area. Once a month he got a day off to go to Chicago and visit his uncle.
196, side 1	919: FATHER'S WORK He was working at Boeman's (?) Dairy where he took care of the horses in the barn. He did that for a year and then he sent for the rest of the family to come over. When they came, he bought a farm in New York where there were quite a few Danes.
196, side 1	945: PREJUDICES Didn't feel any.
196, side 1	955: Soon after the family came over, Fred quit his job so that he could be with the family. He worked on the farm some, at the cemetery, and for the highway department.
196, side 1	967: DANISH AMERICAN FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS There was one in Tyler, Minnesota and one in Nysted (?), Nebraska. Fred, his brother, and another boy went and spent the winter in Nebraska at that Folk High School. This was a Danish community. These schools were closely linked to the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church or the Dansk Kirke I Amerika. At school they did a lot of singing. They all lived at the school. They listened to Danish and American lectures. They also studied American language. They were mostly young people. They were there for three months.
196, side 1	1020: WORK Got a job as a taxi driver in Chicago, Illinois for about a half a year, but he didn't like it.

Container(s)	Description
196, side 1	<p>1027: TYLER, MINNESOTA</p> <p>All of the four brothers went to the folk high school there. Their father had said that their mother could help with the milking. He wanted all four boys to go. They don't have the school anymore but there is a Danish folk meeting every fall that they go to.</p>
196, side 1	<p>1045: FARM WORK</p> <p>They were paid by the month. He thinks that he was making about \$185-200 per month. They worked about 10 hours a day. He would milk cows and drive the team to do the harrowing, plowing, and seeding. He would also cut wood. In Denmark, the farms were smaller and every bit of land was utilized and in America things were bigger and it wasn't such a science to be able to be a farmer. In Denmark they went to school to learn to be good farmers. There were many farm cooperatives in Denmark while in New York, big companies would try to break up the American cooperatives they tried to farm.</p>
196, side 1	<p>1105: COOPERATIVES</p> <p>There were in Delaware county in New York. This was dairy farm community and there were three creameries.</p>
196, side 2	<p>025: COOPERATIVE</p> <p>There was a cooperative creamery and two other creameries. The other creameries raised the price they were paying for milk until the cooperative was out of business and then they lowered it again. In a cooperative the farmers have more control. There's no middle man.</p>
196, side 2	<p>170: NEW YORK</p> <p>Worked for the creamery and the highway department. He was interested in machinery and wanted to be a bulldozer operator.</p>
196, side 2	<p>190: SOLVANG, CALIFORNIA</p> <p>Came here after he had been in the Folk High School. This was during the depression. This was a Danish town. There was a Danish folk high school and church there. He had a lot of fun in this town. They would play for folk dances. Fred played the accordion, his brother played the violin, and their friend played the piano. He taught himself to play.</p>
196, side 2	<p>268: MEETING SPOUSE</p> <p>They met in Solvang. Many farm girls from the Midwest came to Santa Barbara to work as maids or cooks then they would come up to Solvang for the monthly young people's society meeting. They would have lecturers and folk dancing afterward.</p>
196, side 2	<p>295: WORK IN SOLVANG</p> <p>He got a job on highway construction and he got to run a bulldozer.</p>

Container(s)	Description
196, side 2	<p>310: GOLD MINING</p> <p>He went with some friends to Nevada. There were a lot of snow. They found animals trapped in the snow and dead. They packed their things up on horses and made camp. There were some buildings there, but he used his tent. He learned how to wash gold. He worked with a man who used to be a trapper.</p>
196, side 2	<p>434:</p> <p>While working north of Chicago, Fred was a teamster on a construction job. He drove the team with a dump wagon. This was before they had bulldozers. They built a cemetery and a golf course.</p>
196, side 2	<p>450: GOLD MINING</p> <p>The gold was mostly on bedrock. They sold the gold to the US Mint in San Francisco. They made good wages at it.</p>
196, side 2	<p>480: GOLD MINING (2ND PLACE)</p> <p>A Dane, Knud Nielsen (?) had leased some gold bearing property to some men who didn't know what they were doing. He wanted him to go down there with him and take possession of the land. In Nevada, in those days, possession was 90 points of the law. The other prospectors didn't want to leave and put up a fight, punches were thrown, rifles were drawn, and the sheriff settled it. Knud sold this land to Fred. This was about 1935-37. He bought himself a bulldozer and paid for it out of the upper soil. In the winter when it got too wet to dry wash he was down to the bedrock and he made out real well on that. Every winter he would go to Solvang, California.</p>
196, side 2	<p>648: WIFE</p> <p>Esther Larsen (?). She is of Danish descent. (See counter II-268). She had three other sisters working in Santa Barbara, California. She lived with him in the tent in Nevada for a while after they were married. They were married in Viborg, South Dakota in 1938. Viborg was a Danish town. His parents came from New York to the wedding.</p>
196, side 2	<p>715: HONEYMOON</p> <p>Went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota and bought a Chrysler Coupe which was used. They drove to New York and down through the southern states and back up to Nevada.</p>
196, side 2	<p>723: NEWLYWEDS</p> <p>When they got to Nevada, the bed that he had ordered from Sears and Roebuck hadn't come so they made a mattress out of sage brush which they slept on for a few nights. They were living in his tent. They had to carry their water. They slept outside that summer. The first winter they slept in a shack which was down the mountain a ways. The next summer they had a cabin built.</p>
196, side 2	<p>772: GOLD NUGGET</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>He was cleaning bedrock when he found a big nugget. They took it to the post office in town. Soon there was a crowd about. It was the biggest nugget found in that mining town. It weighed 19oz. By gold value it was worth \$550 and he sold it for about \$1000 as a specialty item.</p>
196, side 2	<p>810: WWII The administration didn't want gold. They wanted copper and lead for the war movement. He couldn't get supplies for his mining so he quit. He had had one man working with him. He had a brother living in Renton, Washington. He said that there was a shortage of bulldozers up here so he loaded his bulldozer and took off for Washington.</p>
196, side 2	<p>835: LUTHERLAND They couldn't find a place to live. They went to the Danish Church and Pastor Sorenson who was on the board directors at Lutherland told them that they needed caretakers at the camp. They were the caretakers there for a couple of years. It was between Auburn and Federal Way and near Lake Kalarny (?). They would help the different church groups get their camps set up.</p>
196, side 2	<p>870: BULLDOZING He liked equipment and wanted to be good at it. He did turn out to be a successful contractor. When he sold out in 1975 he had all kinds of equipment. He started a heavy equipment business called F.C. Madsen & Son.</p>
196, side 2	<p>890: FAMILY They have two boys. The oldest, Pete went to college and got a degree in Chemistry last year. He is now a chemist at Bremerton Navy Yard. The youngest son was very interested in the equipment. He went to Pullman and got a degree in engineering and business administration. He has a good job in Fairbanks, Alaska with an earth moving contracting firm. This is Dana Sleiborg Madsen. They have three grandchildren.</p>
196, side 2	<p>970: INTEREST IN DANISH CULTURE Pete was at the Grandview College in Des Moines, Iowa and that is a Danish Church School and Seminary. Dana's wife is interested in anything Danish.</p>
196, side 2	<p>985: FOLK MEETING It is like a week at the folk high school. They do singing, listen to lectures, folk dancing, and learn to realize what is worthwhile in life. The folk meetings take place in Menucha, Oregon which is 20 miles east of Portland and in Tyler, Minnesota. The one in Tyler is only four days but he wouldn't miss it. Some of the lectures are in Danish and most of the songs are in Danish.</p>
196, side 2	<p>1050: SPOKEN DANISH</p>

Container(s)	Description
	He reads from the Danish American paper he gets from Osco, Minnesota (?). It is a short poem in official Danish. Then he gives a short summary of this interview in his own dialect which is Jysk.
196, side 2	1120: VISITS TO DENMARK When he spoke Danish it was in a dialect that they hadn't heard for years. They were there in 1972. They were also there two years ago. When they were in Denmark for 3-4 weeks everyday was a banquet. They also went on a tour of Europe. His wife and her sister were also on the trip.
197, side 1	010: DANISH FOOD They were invited to all their relatives. Everything tastes good.
197, side 1	042: DANISH WEDDING They have a big "blow out." There is a fancy dinner, they rent a hotel, usually someone has composed a song, they sing and afterwards there is singing and dancing. They always have a Danish Beer and Akvavit with the Danish open faced sandwiches (Smørrebrød).
197, side 1	128: SECOND TRIP (1980) They were treated the same.
197, side 1	144: 1972 TRIP Everything was different from when he was there. Everything was mechanized and very few people used horse for farm work. They used horses for everything when he was working on the Danish farms.
197, side 1	183: DANISH PEOPLE They are a happy people. They are much more mature in their feelings on how the world should be. They are concerned for the third world countries. It all goes back to what the Danes learned in their folk high schools.
197, side 1	275: BOOKS He has a song book for the Danish people in America. It has some English songs in the back too. One of his favorites was written by Grundtvig. This year is about 100 years since Grundtvig died.
197, side 1	375: CHURCH LIFE He has usually been on the church council. This is for the Lutheran church. They were caretakers at Lutherland too. He feels that the folk schools also prepared him for life in the church. They were church affiliated.
197, side 1	415: ORGANIZATIONS Helped to start a community club down by Lake Kalarny (?). He also served as water commission and fire commissioner. He was active and interested in the community he was living in.

Container(s)	Description
197, side 1	438: DANISH BROTHERHOOD It is a different group than the folk high school group. He belongs.
197, side 1	463: HE DESCRIBES HIS LIFE It has been very satisfactory. He is happy that he has been able to contribute a little to the world. He has been active lately in the Peace Initiatives.
197, side 1	490: NUCLEAR FREEZE GROUP He will be a member of one which is starting in Enumclaw. He attends all the groups that work for peace. "It is insanity, really, the way America is doing now." Europeans in general are not very happy with American politics.
197, side 1	520: IMPORTANCE OF DANISH HERITAGE Just the singing part of his Danish heritage means a lot to him. They cover everything in life. It has helped him to learn to be aware of the whole world and not just the country he is living in. He thinks that because he is a Dane and has gone to folk schools, he is a better American for it.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas
 Confirmation
 Danish-Americans--Interviews
 Danish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Social life and customs
 Denmark -- Social conditions -- 1945-
 Education
 Emigration and immigration
 Folk high schools -- Denmark
 Peace movements
 Rebild Nationalpark
 World War, 1914-1918

Personal Names :

Grønborg Madsen, Thomasine Kristine
 Larsen Madsen, Esther
 Madsen, Mark Christian Sleiborg
 Madsen, Frederik Christensen--Interviews
 (creator)
 Wendelbo Nielsen Madsen, Agnes
 Madsen, Alfred Dana Sleiborg
 Madsen, Peter Christensen
 Madsen, Peter Frederik Sleiborg
 Madsen, Steffen
 Nielsen, Niels Christian

Corporate Names :

Danish Brotherhood in America. Lodge 29 (Seattle, Wash.)

Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Danish-American Heritage Society (Seattle, Wash.)
Frederick VIII (Steamship)
Harmonien (Seattle, Wash.)
Nordic Heritage Museum

Family Names :

Grønborg family
Larsen family
Madsen family
Nielsen family
Wendelbo family

Geographical Names :

Brainerd (Minn.)
Enumclaw (Wash.)
Hygum (Denmark)
Nysted (Neb.)
Solvang (Calif.)
Tyler (Minn.)
Vejle (Denmark)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Contractors
Farmers
Miners

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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