

# Signe Linnea Anderson Steel Oral History, 1902-1982

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Steel, Signe Linnea Anderson
<b>Title</b>	Signe Linnea Anderson Steel Oral History
<b>Dates</b>	1902-1982 (inclusive) 1902 1982
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders, 4 photographs, 1 sound cassette, 0 compact discs.
<b>Collection Number</b>	t176
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Signe Linnea Anderson Steel, a Swedish 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 Linnea Steel, originally Signe Linnea Anderson, was born on June 8, 1902 in Sjösvedjan, Sweden. Signe's father, Erik Ferdinand Anderson, worked in lumber, and her mother, Ester Alexandria Anderson, did some cooking for the workers. The Anderson family lived in a small cottage. For a short time, they lived in Norway before deciding to move to America in 1906. Signe's sister Elsa was born shortly before the move, and her brothers Fred and Harry were born after they had settled in America.

The Anderson's met Uncle Oscar on Fir Island near Mt. Vernon, Washington. Signe's father found a job at a mill in Cedarhome, Washington. In 1913, Signe's father died in a horse accident, and her mother died four years later from heart and kidney complications. Signe had to quit school to take care of the farm and her siblings. Relatives and friends helped the orphaned Anderson's as much as they could, but Signe also selflessly reached out to others who had no place to go. At the age of 15, Signe left Cedarhome for a good housekeeping job in Seattle. She was reluctant to go, but her sister Elsa was old enough to be responsible. For three years, Signe worked as a housekeeper for two successful families in Seattle. Signe joined the Order of Vasa in 1920 and then became involved in the Swedish Club.

Through friends, Signe met her husband, Jack Steel, and they married in 1923. The two of them lived in Seattle; they never had children, but Signe's younger brothers lived with them for a while. Jack worked as a foreman for a painting firm; he even did some contracting on his own. Signe and Jack lived in Seattle in a few small homes, one of which they lost during the Depression. Jack died in 1961. Signe has become quite active in the community, especially in the Swedish Foundation where she interviews people who need money. She visits nursing homes and produces musical programs in her area. Signe returned to Sweden in 1971 to visit friends and relatives. She continues to practice some Swedish traditions, such as placing branches of fir by the front door at Christmas time.

### Lineage

Full Name: Signe Linnea Anderson Steel. Maiden Name: Signe Linnea Anderson. Father: Erik Ferdinand Anderson. Mother: Ester Alexandria Anderson. Paternal Grandfather: Anders Andersson. Paternal Grandmother: Karin Andersson. Maternal Grandfather: Anders Andersson. Maternal Grandmother: Wilhelmina Andersson. Brothers and Sisters: Elsa Frideborg, Fred Julius Anderson. Spouse: Jack A. Steel.

## Content Description

The interview was conducted with Signe Steel on May 17, 1982 in Seattle, Washington. This interview contains information on personal background, emigration, family, employment, and community life. The interview also includes a paper by Signe Steel entitled "Emigrants" and photographs of Cedarhome School in Washington, Signe and her siblings Fred and Elsa as children, Signe on Confirmation Day (1916), and Signe and Jack Steel as a young couple. 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, Washington University of Washington Press 1993

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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
<a href="#">Cassette</a>	
176, side 1	022: Signe Linnea Anderson Steel Linnea is a name of a flower named after the famous botanist. Born Sjösvedjan, Sweden, it took 20 minutes to get by bus to Sundsvall. This is in central Sweden. Born June 8, 1902.
176, side 1	060: Recalls a visit in 1971 when she met up with some of her playmates from childhood, saw things from her childhood.
176, side 1	085: PARENTS Erik Ferdinand Anderson and Ester Alexandria Anderson. Mother was born on an island, Alnön, and her father was born in Västerbotten. They were married and lived in Sjösvedjan because her mother was raised there.
176, side 1	112: GRANDPARENTS Remembers maternal grandfather, Anders Andersson. Paternal grandfather had the same name. Maternal grandmother was Wilhelmina. Paternal grandmother was Karin. Did not know her father's parents.

Container(s)	Description
176, side 1	143: The area was a logging community. Father worked in lumbering. In the summer time, they were on a nearby island where they made coke. Mother did cooking for about eight men there. Father also worked at the sawmill.
176, side 1	195: Grandfathers also worked in the mill or were involved in the lumber industry somehow.
176, side 1	204: CHILDHOOD HOME Parents rented their home. Two room cottage, red with white corners. One bedroom and a cot in the kitchen where Signe slept. Had a beautiful grandfather clock. Parents were young and did not have much.
176, side 1	248: Reason parents came to America is because Signe's Uncle Carl Nils was laid off work so he came to America. They contacted Signe's father's sister who lived on Fir Island near Mount Vernon, Oscar Viland. Things were getting bad in Sweden, father also laid off work.
176, side 1	282: Sister Elsa was also born in Sweden in 1906. She was 7 months old when she came to America. Signe was four years old.
176, side 1	294: TRIP OVER Mother and Signe were sick. Came on a boat from the Oceanic Line, an English boat because there were no Swedish boats going to America at that time. Took boat from Göteborg to Liverpool, took train to Southampton where they boarded the boat. Men and women had different areas to stay. They also had an area for those with small pox. Elsa and Signe were vaccinated on the boat for smallpox. Traveled third class. Took three weeks to cross to America. Went to Ellis Island.
176, side 1	380: Took train to Fir Island where they were met by her Uncle Oscar. He was a farmer on the island. Stayed a month with them.
176, side 1	399: Father got a job at a logging camp. English Camp a few miles from Fir-Conway, Washington.
176, side 1	410: Mother unhappy because things were better in Sweden. They lived a few miles from the logging camp.
176, side 1	422:

Container(s)	Description
	Father got a job at Nicolson's Mill in Cedarhome. Bought five acres from the Olsons in Cedarhome. Mr. Normand and Mr. Lindberg built their home in 1907/08. This made her parents happy.
176, side 1	450: Had cows, chickens, and pig on this farm.
176, side 1	456: SCHOOL Started school when she was 7 years old. Enjoyed it. Learned English easily in the English Camp. She taught Swedish to the English-speaking children. Her mother studied both English and Swedish.
176, side 1	494: Signe still speaks and writes both English and Swedish.
176, side 1	497: Mother died in 1917, she could read and write English when she died. Father died four years before her mother. Father killed in a horse runaway. Mother developed a goiter because of lack of iodine in the water. It affected her heart and kidneys and she died. Her sister also died of this. It was common in those days. Signe was almost 15 years old when her parents died.
176, side 1	543: She became a mother and father. Had two brothers and sisters. Milked cows, sewed, and baked. No running water and electricity.
176, side 1	552: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Elsa, Fred, and Harry. Elsa went to Beauty Shop school and had shop in Winslow for 11 years before she died. Fred was married to Gladys and then divorced. Then he married Thelma Bottom. He worked for the light, electrical people. Harry also did electrical work. During the Depression Fred and Harry lived with Elsa because she had a house. Boys cut, split, and delivered wood during the Depression for \$2.00 a cord. Then they worked in the shipyard in Winslow.
176, side 1	624: Harry then worked for Boeing until he retired. He was married to Clara Jane Johnson. They had three children.
176, side 1	650: Quit school when her parents died. Kept family together. She sewed all their clothes. Baked bread twice a week. Canned fruit in the summer. Had a big garden. Uncle came to split wood once a week. He lived with them after a few years. Killed a pig in the fall, canned pig and other meat. Gives more detail on the things she did.

Container(s)	Description
176, side 1	729: Boys pumped water for the trough for the cows. They had to pick the eggs. Always had chickens, a pig, and cows. Raised their own food.
176, side 1	743: Mother received \$13.00 a month. Mother's pension from the State. When she died Signe continued getting this. Uncle helped them when he could.
176, side 1	764: Children went to the Methodist church in Cedarhome. Her cousin lived close by, Mary Swanson. They were good friends.
176, side 1	792: Friends from school came to visit her on the farm. Other neighbors were good friends.
176, side 1	829: At Christmas time relatives came over. People with no place to go went to Signe's place. They would come over Christmas Eve for dinner and stay overnight and got to church the next day together.
176, side 1	860: Had a Christmas tree with candles on it. Gave each other gifts. Ate lutefisk and roast pork for Christmas Eve. Had Swedish coffee bread with cardomon. Baked cookies, risgryngroet. Ate lefse and fattigmand when she visited her Norwegian neighbors.
176, side 1	905: Not active in Swedish organizations in Cedarhome. Left in 1920 because her sister was 15 and her uncle learned to do the milking.
176, side 1	925: Signe got work in Seattle for doing housework for \$50.00 a month. Hard to leave her family. The money helped her family in Cedarhome.
176, side 1	949: Worked for H.B. Jones, son of Wesley Jones, the U.S. Senator. Had to learn some new cooking but continued baking and they loved that.
176, side 1	961: Wore a black dress and a white apron. Ate in the kitchen. They sounded the buzzer when she came to serve them. They were her friends. There were seven people in the family. It seemed easy since they had running water and lights. She had her own room.
176, side 1	975: DIFFERENCES IN COOKING

Container(s)	Description
	Learned to make more salads. Made mayonnaise. They enjoyed some of her Swedish baking.
176, side 1	999: They had another woman come and do the big cleaning and the laundry, Signe only helped her. Signe took the baby for a walk every day in Volunteer Park. She did some childcare. They lived on Newton Street. Worked her for 1.5 years.
176, side 1	1025: Worked for George Leghorn, President of Havana Cigars. Had a big house. She had her own room and bathroom. She did all the cooking and cleaning. Paid \$50.00 a month. Stayed for one and a half years.
176, side 1	1061: Joined the Order of the Vasa in 1920. She became active immediately. She was Chaplain and on the coffee committee. They were all young people. Met many people this way. Has belonged here for 62 years. Not as active after 30 years. She was reporting secretary always on various committees. Lovely people involved a good way to get acquainted. To retain the Swedish culture and sick benefit.
176, side 1	1100: Became active in the Swedish Club. They are more active than the Vasa Lodge. Swedish Lodge built in 1960. They have a restaurant. About 7,000 members now. 4,000 associate members and 3,000 active members. It is a private club.
176, side 2	021: MEETING HUSBAND Jack Steel. Met him through other friends. Had a singing society, Harmony Singing Society that leased grounds from Mrs. McGilvra, now the Reed estate. They built a big dance hall and had programs and dancing every Sunday. Signe belonged to this. Many people from Vasa belonged to this. Signe's husband lived in the house at this estate with other men. Signe knew the cook so she went to visit. That's how they met. He then joined Vasa.
176, side 2	095: Husband is Swedish. He was 19 when he came to America. He learned his trade in Sweden. In 1971 when she traveled to Sweden she was able to see her husband's home and meet some of his family.
176, side 2	120: Knew each other for two years before married. Wedding in 1923. Had a small wedding. Went to pastor's house, Pastor Friberg's home and had a dinner with John and Ida Nordeen. Had a big party after the wedding. Pastor was Swedish Baptist. Church was on 9th and Pine.

Container(s)	Description
176, side 2	169: Everyone knew Reverend Friborg because he was active in the culture society. Did lots of speaking.
176, side 2	180: Quit work when she was married. They lived in Seattle. Her husband worked for Nielson and Chrystal as a foreman. This is a painting firm. They worked on big fancy home. He did some contracting on his own.
176, side 2	219: Owned their own home in Seattle. They built a little home out by the McGilvra estate, lived there until 1929. Bought a home in Green Lake, the old Wheeler home. Lost this home in the Depression. Bought a home by Lincoln Park in West Seattle. Sold this in 1968.
176, side 2	269: Husband died in 1961. She never had children but felt that she had because she raised her brothers and sisters. All her siblings have passed away. Brothers lived with Signe and Jack in Seattle. One was 11 and one 14.
176, side 2	321: Sold the home in Cedarhome. Rented it for a year but that did not work very well.
176, side 2	334: COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS Last 8-9 years has been a member of the Swedish Foundation. Organized first by Reverend Friborg. Gives background on the development of the Foundation. Only about 25 people belong. Invest the money they have and every penny of interest is donated to charity. Meet once a year. Signe is involved in deciding who gets the charity. She interviews people who need money.
176, side 2	422: Her name is in at different places so people can contact her. She has her name at Neighborhood House, a low income housing place. Signe works more with young people. The people are screened before Signe sees them.
176, side 2	488: Signe used to visit the nursing homes. She would bake and put together a program for the people. They went once a month. She takes clothes to her friends in the nursing homes.
176, side 2	533: She puts on programs now where she is living. Musical programs and other things. Talks about some of the groups that have come. She started arranging programs when she retired.



Container(s)	Description
176, side 2	600: TRIPS BACK TO SWEDEN: 1971. Got the fare through the Swedish Clubs. Visited friends of friends. She went with Agnes Lewis. Remembered her home when she went back. Recalls when her sister was born. Her playmates were all there still. Visited some of her relatives.
176, side 2	652: Proud to be Swedish. Everyone should retain their culture. There is good and bad in everybody. Admires all cultures, all interesting. It is a joy to learn from each other. We are all equal.
176, side 2	684: Proud to be Swedish. Everyone should retain their culture. There is good and bad in everybody. Admires all cultures, all interesting. It is a joy to learn from each other. We are all equal.
176, side 2	707: Signe's father repaid the money they had borrowed when they came over. Admired her parents for paying back the loan. He did not earn that much, \$2.00 a day, ten hours, later promoted to \$2.50. This was at Cedarhome Mill. One mile from their home. He was the night watchman for awhile.
176, side 2	748: Christmas time always had branches of fir out by the front door. She still continues to do this as it is a Swedish custom. She still does Swedish baking.
176, side 2	765: KEEPSAKES Still had her mother's old watch. Had a silver serving pot but has given it away that was from her grandmother. She has given many things away. Has a piece of embroidery that her mother made when she was 7 years old.
176, side 2	817: Gives an account of a fellow in Seattle who was a wino. She made contact with his people in Sweden. He was sick and living in a nursing home and Signe went to visit him often. He was from a fine family. She met his family when she was in Sweden.
176, side 2	874: WORK Did part time work at Rhodes. She worked with slipcovers. This was an upholstery place. In 1950, quit for a awhile until she got a call from the union. Someone needed her at Hart and Sons on Broadway. This was a custom upholstery place. She was hired on here full time. Stayed for fifteen years. Retired at age 63. She did the cutting and sewing. She worked very hard.
176, side 2	915:

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Talks about the time that she broke her arm.

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## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Emigration and immigration  
 Family -- Sweden  
 Ocean travel  
 Sweden -- Social conditions -- 1945-  
 Swedish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Swedish-Americans--Social life and customs

### Personal Names :

Frideborg, Elsa  
 Steel, Signe Linnea --Interviews  
 (creator)  
 Anderson, Erik Ferdinand  
 Anderson, Ester Alexandria  
 Anderson, Signe Linnea  
 Andersson, Anders  
 Andersson, Karin  
 Andersson, Wilhelmina  
 Steel, Jack A.

### Corporate Names :

Harmony Society (Seattle, Wash.)  
 Swedish Club (Seattle, Wash.)  
 Vasa Order of America. Lodge Number 228 (Seattle, Wash.)

### Family Names :

Anderson family  
 Andersson family  
 Steel family

### Geographical Names :

Alnön (Sweden)  
 Cedarhome (Wash.)  
 Medelpad (Sweden)  
 Seattle (Wash.)  
 Småland (Sweden)  
 Sundsvall (Sweden)  
 Västerbotten (Sweden)

### Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

### Occupations :

Domestics  
 Loggers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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