

Sigrid Marie Andersen Oral History Interview, 1978

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Andersen, Sigrid Marie
Title	Sigrid Marie Andersen Oral History Interview
Dates	1978 (inclusive) 1978 1978
Quantity	2 file folders 1 sound cassette 2 compact discs
Collection Number	t003
Summary	An oral history interview with Sigrid Marie Andersen, 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

Sigrid Andersen was born in Næsby, Lolland, Denmark in 1885. Her father was a dancing instructor and her mother an obstetrician. Sigrid had five sisters and one brother. She finished seven years of school, not attending high school, and then went on to work for local doctors, learning all that she could. In 1904, Sigrid's uncle, who had been living in America for many years, chose her return to America with him. Once in America, she first stayed with her uncle near Forest City, IA and then stayed with the Marshall family-Mr. Marshall was the Congregational minister-to improve her English. Harald Andersen was a follow passenger of Sigrid's when she immigrated to America, and after he settled in St. Paul, he asked her to join him. After a year in St. Paul, they moved to Tacoma, and in 1907, they were married in the Danish Lutheran Church. In Tacoma, Harald worked for Northern Pacific Railroad and made a good salary, allowing them to have one house in town and one on American Lake. The Andersen's had four children: Elsie, Stan, Harald, and Morris. When all of their sons moved to California, Harald

and Sigrid decided to move too. Sigrid has fond memories of selling jewelry at the World Fair in San Francisco. After thirty-five years of marriage, Sigrid divorced Harald. She later settled in Tacoma again.

Lineage

Full Name: Sigrid Marie Andersen. Maiden Name: Sigrid Marie Christiansen. Brothers and Sisters: There were seven children in all, six girls and one boy. Spouse: Harald Bernhard Andersen. Children: Elsie Andersen, Stan Andersen, Harald Andersen, Morris Andersen.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Sigrid Andersen in Tacoma, Wash. on April 11, 1978. It contains information on Sigrid's family life and background, emigration, marriage, settling in, and Danish heritage. 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 Steven Melton 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	
3, side 1	005/11: FAMILY BACKGROUND Born Sigrid Marie Christiansen on June 5, 1885, in Næsby, Lolland, Denmark. (Næsby is in the northwest corner of Lolland.)
3, side 1	030: Her husband was Harald Bernhard Andersen. They had four children: Elsie, Stan, Harald, and Morris.
3, side 1	063/12: EMIGRATION The boat arrived at Ellis Island, NY, on a November evening in 1904. "It was a terrific sight to see all New York lit up. Beautiful!" Everyone was examined on Ellis Island. She was fortunate because she came with an uncle who was an American citizen; things moved quickly. They boarded a train to Boston where they changed trains for Iowa. It was a uneventful trip except for eating her first piece of pie and seeing a picture of President (Teddy) Roosevelt. She wondered how he was elected; his looks - beard and bushy hair - were scary.
3, side 1	107: In Iowa she stayed in her uncle's home and went to school that first, cold winter, walking about a mile to the schoolhouse - her face covered with a scarf.
3, side 1	129: In Næsby her father was a dancing teacher. Her mother had graduated from the largest hospital in Copenhagen as an obstetrician [midwife?]. She worked for the Danish government for over 40 years in the same place.
3, side 1	161:

Container(s)	Description
	<p>One of Sigrid's sisters was trained as an obstetrician also - to follow her mother. However, she didn't graduate with high enough grades, so she settled into practice in Copenhagen. After WWII this sister visited Sigrid. As a medical person she had to wear white, and they were destitute for clothes and white fabric in Denmark - had used sheets. She bought lots of material here; "went home with trunks full of goods". During the war Sigrid sent cigars to a brother-in-law, coffee, etc. to her family. He like the cigars. Nobody liked the American coffee - but they used it.</p>
3, side 1	<p>214/13 Sigrid has nieces, nephews, and cousins back in Denmark. She returned for a visit in June 1967-8 (?) - a beautiful time of the year in Denmark. She met a doctor-cousin who received specialized training in Germany. He and a German doctor, Dr. Vincent (?), discovered a new x-ray technique.</p>
3, side 1	<p>268: REASONS FOR EMIGRATING There weren't any. There were six sisters, and her uncle chose Sigrid to return to America with him. She doesn't know if she was lucky to have been chosen; "I think I would have been lucky if I'd been home, too." On the day they were to leave Næsby by train, a pick-pocket stole her uncle's money and papers. He reacted quickly and telegraphed his IA bank which in turn contacted a Danish bank which issued her wealthy uncle more money. This uncle was mother's brother and had been in the US for many years.</p>
3, side 1	<p>316/14: They sailed first class on Oscar II; she shared a cabin with a lady. She could see the poor people in the hold who carried their own bedding and food on board. The 10 day trip was very stormy; she was never seasick. Her uncle had paid for her passage.</p>
3, side 1	<p>355/15: SETTLING IN She lived with her uncle on his farm by Forest City, Iowa. There were many Danish people in the area--so many, it was difficult to learn English. She didn't appreciate it then, but it was good for her to attend school. Then she stayed with the Marshall family to improve her English. He was the Congregational minister, and he, his wife, and little boy spoke only English.</p>
3, side 1	<p>370: MEETING SPOUSE On the boat there was a fellow passenger she had met once in Naesby. She had been staying at a place outside of town and coming in from the field in early summer with arms full of wild flowers; poppies, cornflowers, white daisies. "I guess I must have made a picture to him. I never saw him again. But when he heard I was going to America, then he wanted to go too. I didn't know anything about all that. So his brother - an older brother - let him have the money to go."He (Anders) went to St. Paul; he was a machinist - having learned his trade in Denmark - and found work right away. After awhile he corresponded with Sigrid and begged her to come to St. Paul.</p>

Container(s)	Description
3, side 1	<p>392/16: That's what she did. Was in St. Paul for a year doing anything to learn more English. Anders decided to go west to Tacoma with his brother (she doesn't know what prompted this), and once again he wanted her to come also. By then she'd earned enough money to buy a ticket and follow.</p>
3, side 1	<p>410: SETTLING IN They lived in Tacoma many years (about 30) until 1937. Then she visited her daughter in NY; stayed a month. In Tacoma, they had two homes: one in town and the other on American Lake. Her husband made good salaries. The boys were all grown up. Stan the oldest boy was killed in France during the Second World War.</p>
3, side 1	<p>427/17: Sigrid had no problems settling in. She remembers dances and sleigh rides as a young girl in Iowa. Her uncle was a Christian man, so she was involved with the church. Sigrid gradually learned English by mixing with a lot of people and by staying at the minister's house. After marriage, she spoke Danish infrequently. They didn't associate with Danes even though there were lots around Tacoma; they wanted to learn the English language. Her children were never taught Danish but helped her with English after they started school. Sigrid was invited to be a housemother at UPS (college then); many of the young people were often at her home. Didn't accept it as she had four children of her own to raise.</p>
3, side 1	<p>470: CITIZENSHIP She acquired her citizenship through marriage, but she has her own papers.</p>
3, side 1	<p>502: Sigrid and Anders were married in 1907 in the new Danish Lutheran Church - the first couple married there. Her mother had instilled in her girls that "you could never marry in white except if you were a virgin. But if you wore colored clothes you were not a virgin. I went out on my own and bought a whole outfit: veil and shoes and gloves and a big bunch of roses. We had a photograph made of that and sent to Denmark so my mother could see I was a virgin when I got married."It was a small, simple affair with only the pastor, his wife, a deacon, and their two people present. She had spent the afternoon preparing their rented apartment.</p>
3, side 1	<p>534/19: FAMILY LIFE Anders worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad. She did not work after marriage, but took care of the children, house, food preservation, etc. After the three-room apartment, they moved to a small cottage. Her husband liked to play cards as a hobby. She didn't, but went along and knitted.</p>
3, side 1	<p>597/01: HOLIDAYS</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>Sigrid is partial to Danish Independence Day, June 5, as it coincided with her birthday; she never had school on her birthday. This day was not celebrated with the Danish community. In Denmark their living room was stuffed with the decorated Christmas tree. Kids couldn't see it until after Christmas eve dinner. Then all went in, sang hymns, and walked around the tree. This was the height of Christmas.</p>
3, side 1	<p>633: In Tacoma their recreation was going to American Lake, first by train and later by streetcar. They eventually bought government land and built a home on the lake the same year the Veteran's Administration Hospital was built. It was a nice piece of property with a good view.</p>
3, side 1	<p>670: There was a storm (typhoon) one November. Anders had picked Sigrid up from church and they'd gone to dinner downtown where they noticed a lot of damage. Checking their lake home, they found it criss-crossed by seven trees. The renters had escaped but their car had rolled into the lake. The Andersen's spent the summers at the lake and rented it out during the winters.</p>
3, side 1	<p>706/02: DANISH HERITAGE General talk about Danish Independence Day; an annual event at a national place in Denmark, her son attending one year when the king and queen were present, and Sigrid visiting this place.</p>
3, side 1	<p>734/03: They never belonged to any Danish groups but subscribed to the Danish newspaper Danske Pioner which was printed in Omaha, Nebraska - a strong Danish community.</p>
3, side 1	<p>747: In Denmark she had no contact with other Scandinavian people. She knew that Swedish womenfolk came to Denmark to thin and weed the sugar beets in spring and to harvest them in fall. There was a train that ran the length of the land, and the girls came on that train.</p>
3, side 2	<p>011/04: DANISH COOKING She made a lot of Danish food including roast duck and goose, meatballs, homemade sausages, head cheese. But she never made or ate blood sausage. These were mostly winter foods.</p>
3, side 2	<p>070: In Denmark they had many vegetables: artichokes (wasn't very common), good potatoes, beans, peas, cucumbers. Her parents' place was ringed by fruit trees, not a fence; had plums and cherries which the city people came and got.</p>
3, side 2	<p>098: CHRISTMAS FOODS</p>

Container(s)	Description
	It was during the winter, so they had lots of the butchered meats. Made lots of cookies. The "klejner" (the Danish equivalent of Norwegian fattigmann) were made the year round, as were "aebleskiver" which were made in an iron frying pan.
3, side 2	148/05: CHURCH They never became members. Both she and her husband were brought up in the Lutheran Church in Denmark, but he never would go to church. He spent a lot of money on music for his children. Elsie sang solos at church (6th Avenue Baptist Church) and gave concerts at college (UPS), but he never went to hear her.
3, side 2	171: "We were married 35 years; then I divorced him. I don't want to tell this." (And, she doesn't.)
3, side 2	176/06: TO CALIFORNIA San Francisco World Fair. All the boys moved to CA. They decided to move there also; it was hard for her husband to find work but he did. When she returned from visiting Elsie in NY, Sigrid sold both houses, furniture, etc. In CA it was near the fair time on Treasure Island. A friend advised her to sell Alaskan jewelry; she had acquired and knew a lot about this jewelry when they lived in Anchorage. She did, and considers it "a courageous job". The man who began the Daffodil Parade in Tacoma, Mr. Smiser (?), a decorator, was building the WA state pavilion; he built a beautiful display cart for her. Her booth was in the building where the foreign nations had exhibits. Denmark was there, had a nice exhibit.
3, side 2	240: Her space was located next to a big door that led to a garden. One day Mrs. Roosevelt came in and signed the guest book; Sigrid ran over and signed directly under her name.
3, side 2	246: Sigrid was at the fair two years selling jewelry. She arrived early in the morning by ferry; the bridge wasn't there yet. It was a long walk to her booth through beautifully landscaped grounds with big trees and fragrant flowers. Treasure Island was a man-made island and huge trees were brought in. In her heart she would sing the song (hymn), "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses...". It was a beautiful sight. At the fair's end she received a certificate from the commission commending her for good business.
3, side 2	317/07: CHILDREN Elsie was born about 1909; now lives in Arizona. All the children were born at home but with a doctor's help. Elsie and the two boys were born in Tacoma; the last boy was born in 1917 in Anchorage, AK - right when America entered the war.

Container(s)	Description
3, side 2	<p>357: Her husband was helping build the radio system in Anchorage. They only stayed a year, because she didn't like it. "I had to send the children to school in minus 50 degree weather, and I wouldn't do that another year." The summer conditions weren't pleasant either because the mosquitoes were a big problem. She and another woman were taking the children on a picnic one day, and had to return home the mosquitoes were so thick. She saw a man buried who was killed by mosquitoes; also his horse.</p>
3, side 2	<p>381/08: TRADITIONAL CRAFTS, MYTHS, ETC. Here there is Santa Claus, but in Denmark there were "nisse" - a little man who came at Christmas. A big bowl of rice was placed in the hay barn on Christmas Eve. "In the morning everything was gone. But there were probably lots of rats around." That was only a fable.</p>
3, side 2	<p>415/09: SPEAKING DANISH They used to say the Lord's Prayer when she was young, but she can't remember it for sure. She sings an ordinary song in Danish.</p>
3, side 2	<p>445: RETURN TRIP TO DENMARK When she returned in 1967-8 (63 years after emigrating), she was scared she wouldn't be understood. But her Danish came back fluently, surprising her and her relatives. She visited her old school about a quarter mile from her home. It held 50 people and was closed down when they built one big school. She liked reading, geography, and studying old writing. She never liked Danish history as a schoolchild.</p>
3, side 2	<p>480/10 She had six sisters and one brother who was a tiny baby when she left. She doesn't know if boys were encouraged more than girls to continue with education. Boys sat on one side of the room and girls on the other. The teacher used a rod for discipline, if needed. Sigrid did not go to high school but worked for two different doctors in Denmark. Learned what she could there. After marriage, she didn't work but volunteered at UPS and YWCA. She was on the board of the latter, drove around and helped collect money for the building on Broadway.</p>
3, side 2	<p>532/11 : REMINISCES She remembers when part of Tacoma was powerless. The ship - the Lexington - anchored in Puget Sound under Stadium for months generating power for Tacoma. When they first came, Fawcett was the mayor. They were in Tacoma during WWI; everything was scarce. She made clothes for her children and others too, out of old pants and coats. Same with the Depression.</p>
3, side 2	<p>598/12: Talk about other Danish people in this area. There's another Andersen in the Parkland area on 121st ; son's name is Louis.</p>

Container(s)	Description
3, side 2	643: General conversation about the 6th Avenue Baptist Church, children attending Sunday School, Sigrid being the oldest member of the church.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas
 Danish-Americans--Interviews
 Danish-Americans--Northwest,Pacific--Social life and customs
 Denmark -- Social conditions -- 1945-
 Emigration and immigration
 World War -- 1939-1945 -- Denmark

Personal Names :

Andersen, Elsie
 Andersen, Harald
 Andersen, Morris
 Andersen, Stan
 Andersen, Harald B.
 Andersen, Sigrid Marie--Interviews
 (creator)

Corporate Names :

Oscar II (Steamship)

Family Names :

Andersen family
 Christiansen family

Geographical Names :

Anchorage (Alaska)
 Forest City (Iowa)
 Lolland (Denmark)
 San Francisco (Calif.)
 St. Paul (Iowa)
 Tacoma (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Dance teachers
 Domestic
 Midwives

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
 2004