

FAMILY BACKGROUND [The first portion of this interview was not recorded due to equipment difficulties.] Signe was talking about her first days in America compared with Sweden. They had a prize cow in Sweden. It was just her father, sister and Signe at home then.

EMIGRATION She came with father and older sister. Mother had died when Signe was two years old. Pappa was past 60, and he was scared they wouldn't let him land in America because of his age. He paid one son's fare from Minnesota to Boston so he would meet and help them. But, they were late in arriving; had to wait two extra weeks for papers. So the son returned to Minnesota.

Father didn't work here; just joined family. Signe helped around at brothers' homes, caring for children for which she received her room and board. Her father bought a little farm which the boys farmed because he couldn't. She felt they had no business sending for him because he was well off in Sweden. But she was too young to say anything then.

Came from Sundsvall in Sweden. She's returned home twice. It is in the north central part of Sweden which is beautiful country. The Swedish women are great cooks. Even everyday food like potatoes and cabbage were cooked and seasoned properly. They had the best black bread! 'You don't have to take any milk of magnesia when you eat that!'

Father owned a granite quarry in Sweden which is still there. The foundation of Sundsvall's church is built of that granite. Father's half-sister was their housekeeper-cook after Mother died. She was a professional cook. Father's people were probably farmers.

Signe and her husband returned to Sweden twice. She had cousins back in Sweden who were in the brick making business. There was real good clay in the area, and Father had one of those businesses also. One Auntie had kept on with that and done very well after her husband died.

Father emigrated to see his children in Minnesota. They lived by Bemidji on small farms and worked in the woods. Signe was about 14, 16 when they emigrated. Pa bought first class tickets on a German boat, 'Irvania'(?); the rooms were reserved and the food was good. They went over a rough North Sea from Goeteborg to Hull, England, and then by train to Liverpool. Took boat to Boston because it wasn't as busy as New York harbor; then took train to Minnesota. The entire trip took over two weeks, eight days on the Atlantic and three days on the North Sea. The latter was so rough; her sister was very sick on the boat, which was characterized by bunks and lots of sick people. But, no real problems on trip, just small inconveniences like waiting.

Went from Boston to Minneapolis-St. Paul where she had sisters living, and from there to Duluth and then Bemidji. The sons picked them up. She had never seen bananas before. On the boat, she chummed around with a girl who was joining her father in Minneapolis.

SETTLING IN In Bemidji, she learned to speak English by going to school. She remembers wearing a satin blue velvet dress to school, reading a book which made no sense, and having the teacher point to the word blue and then

to her dress. But Signe had no idea if she was referring to blue, satin, or velvet. Signe was good in Swedish school, so she learned readily in America also. She took care of children in Midwest. Out West, she took up hair work at Thorson's. She wanted to learn something besides childcare. She worked at Thorson's until she married.

There was no Swedish church in Bemidji, only Norwegian, which they attended occasionally. She worked awhile in Bemidji for a doctor's wife who was in real estate business. Signe would go along and help her fix up houses, hang wallpaper, *etc.* Signe learned to speak English quite well as companion-employee to this lady. When her father died, Signe moved to Minneapolis.

Citizenship was attained before marriage. She wanted to be an American citizen but was very scared before the judge. Her English was pretty good; he was nice and asked only a couple of questions; and she got her papers.

**MARRIAGE** She and her husband worked together on a small farm on McNeil Island. He had worked in the woods for Milwaukee Railroad. Then he attended Lincoln High School to learn algebra, etc., in order to do inspection work in the lumber business. He did very well at his job. For entertainment, they went to shows if they could afford it. Gave older boy music lessons because he was talented. Dancing was popular in Sweden as was reading.

**SWEDISH CUSTOMS** They attended some Valhalla celebrations, but they both were pretty young when they emigrated, so didn't keep up with the Swedish traditions except at Christmas time. They never subscribed to any Swedish newspapers, but read American papers. Besides Valhalla, there were few Swedish connections. Their close friends were from her husband's business connection. At Christmas she would cook lutefisk. Her daughter-in-law, Dorothy, is Scotch and ate lutefisk when first engaged to Robert. After marriage, when she was family, she decided not to be polite and eat it. But Robert likes lutefisk.

Signe has belonged to First Lutheran Church for many years.

Medical care was good when her children were born. Had a doctor, although she had to come early from McNeil Island and stay in Tacoma. Husband had ten acres of land there purchased before they were married. They built a house and lived there.

Signe still knits and crochets, skills she learned as a child when they had to knit their own stockings.

Speaking Swedish. She still speaks Swedish. Recites 'Fader vaar...'.

**FAMILY BACKGROUND** Full name is Signe Amalia [Emilie ?] Ohberg Carlson (Mrs. Anton Carlson). Born in Sundsvall, Sweden in 1887. She was 91 years old at the time of the interview. Doesn't remember mother's name; she died when Signe was two years old. Her father, Malcolm Ohberg, kept up the farm. He was really a businessman but had a farm too. After her mother died, his oldest sister came to the farm and raised the children. There were four girls and one boy. Father had been married before. He had two girls and two boys by the first marriage who were grown up and gone. The boys had gone to America but the girls married and stayed in Sweden.

Signe was the youngest of all nine children.

Doesn't remember grandparents.

The family name was a regular name. Father came from southern part, but northern part was booming so he came to start a business. He made bricks for houses; uncle was in that business also. Good clay in that country. The big Lutheran Church in Sundsvall is made of father's and uncle's bricks. Father bought a farm with granite rocks which were hewed, smoothed and sold for house and church foundations. Also, the biggest building in town has his bricks and granite in its structure. The home farm was a beautiful place within the city limit. Sold this place. The law in Sweden, if mother or father died, the children at the age of 17 or 18 could demand the dead parent's inheritance. Brothers wanted to emigrate to America, so the farm was sold to pay them.

SCHOOL Signe attended school and was confirmed in Sweden.

EMIGRATION Signe was about 14-15 when she came to America with her father and sister. The others [two half-brothers and at least three sisters] were already here. Dad wanted to retire. The boys wrote and told how wonderful it was in America. 'Well, it wasn't. Not at that time.' Boys took up homesteads around Bemidji, Minnesota and worked as loggers.

TRIP They left from Gäddedeberg and went over the North Sea to Hull, England, then across the Atlantic on a big German boat, 'Irvania' (?). She and her father weren't seasick, but sister was. Landed in Boston. No trouble. The boys had arranged everything and Pappa had money. Came in the fall and the ocean was rather rough. She met another girl on boat and they had a fun time investigating the boat. Had brought some clothing, but left a lot of clothes and remainder of goods in Sweden. They were allowed five trunks for the three people. So they brought two, three feather beds, clothes and 'fjell' (? a sheepskin cover). The brother's wives took the beds and fjell plus some homemade .....(?). Dad didn't really make a new home in Minnesota because he had two sons and one daughter married and with homes around Bemidji. Signe stayed with one of the brothers and helped with a new baby. Next spring, she moved to Minneapolis to one of her sister's. She got a house job caring for children.

Then she came out West to Tacoma; she had two married sisters living here. She surprised them. One sister lived in the Midland area on a 10-20 acre farm. They wrote continually and asked her to come. So she finally wrote back 'If you want to find out some more about my father, I'll tell you more when I come out to see you'. They didn't realize Signe was serious. She saved enough money [\$75-80] to buy a train ticket. She arrived in Tacoma on a Saturday night in the springtime with only the Midland address on Golden Given Road. There was bus service to that area, but it was a long walk to the house from the bus stop, and the road was barely fit for lumber wagons. The train people called the post office to locate the address. And she hired a horse and buggy taxi to take her to Parkland; there they pinpointed the approximate location of the house. She and the taxi driver walked the final leg of the road. She rapped on the door, brother-in-law answered. Her sister, with her back to the door, was sitting with one child on her lap and the other on a potty.

Signe paid the taxi driver \$10. Sister Tilla was so astonished at her arrival. Other sister, Gurde ?, lived across the road, so they went to visit right away, and she was surprised, too.

Signe stayed with her sisters and got a job at Thorson's. Took the bus in the summer and worked for Thorson's until she got married. Had moved to an apartment in Tacoma by that time.

Her husband, Anton Carlson, owned 20 acres on McNeil Island. He was Swedish, born about 80 miles from Sundsvall. They just clicked together. He had two uncles and aunts on McNeil Island with chicken farms; sold eggs and chickens. Also had a garden, cow and horses. Boats ran from Steilacoom or Tacoma to McNeil, stopping also at Old Town and downtown.

After marriage, they built a house and lived on McNeil. Husband was a good-looking man, strong and very nice. They had similar personalities and background, and they 'just clicked together'.

Signe learned English by attending school in Bemidji and by just trying. 'But I didn't like school in America. Usch. No. And I'll tell you why'. She had a good education in Swedish and was a bright student. But she began American school with very young children and felt it was so degrading. She learned fast because she had to make her own way; father didn't have much money left.

She had two boys. One [Orville] died of a heart attack one year before her husband died. Robert is the second son.