

Finding aid for the Godfrey J. Anderson manuscripts Collection 023

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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1986
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Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator	Anderson, Godfrey J., 1895-1981
Title	Godfrey J. Anderson manuscripts
Date [inclusive]	1982-1986
Extent	0.21 Linear feet One box
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Godfrey J. Anderson (1895-1981) was the son of Swedish immigrants and served during World War I as a member of the 337th Field Hospital (the "Polar Bear" expedition). This collection contains his personal reminiscences, where he describes Christmas time among the Swedish immigrants in West Michigan and the beginning of the Swedish mission movement. Also included are Anderson's World War I reminiscences, describing his experiences as a member of the Polar Bear Expedition to Russia, 1918-1919. The troops were sent by the Allies to Northern Russia to protect supplies following the Bolshevik Revolution. Topics include a discussion of daily routine from pre-draft physical to the return to civilian life, traveling as part of the 337th, the Spanish Flu and the cold of North Russia.</p>

Biographical/Historical note

Godfrey J. Anderson (b. 14 November 1895; d. 23 April 1981) was the only child of Swedish immigrants living in Sparta, Michigan. In 1905 the family moved briefly to Tennessee, but returned to the area to live with an uncle on Bridge Street in Grand Rapids. Subsequently the family bought a farm in Ottawa County, one mile west of the Kent/Ottawa County line. Several other Swedish immigrant families owned farms nearby. Anderson attended Berlin High School (now Marne High School).

After completing high school, Anderson worked with his father on the farm, until being drafted in the spring of 1918. He saw service as part of the 337th Field Hospital of the 310th Sanitary Train, formed at Camp Custer, Michigan (once they had been stationed in Northern Russia, the unit acquired the nickname "Polar Bears"). The Polar Bears were sent to Archangel, Russia, upon the fall of the czarist government to the Bolsheviks, who immediately signed a peace treaty with Germany. Because the Allies still had supplies in Russia at that time, the Allied troops were sent there to guard those supplies and to care for the casualties of the resulting Bolshevik offensive.

After the war, Anderson returned to the family farm, and shortly thereafter began work in the Berkey & Gay Furniture Co. factory #1. A year later he left that job for one with the Johnson Furniture Co., where he worked until retiring, circa 1963.

Upon retirement, Anderson spent a great deal of time pursuing his avocation for history. Interested in history and photography from an early age, Anderson turned to photographing a changing Grand Rapids and Kent County, while also copying photographs of historic importance. He also documented the Grand River as its bridges changed from iron truss to concrete spans, and its dams and mills fell into disuse. He also collected a great deal on the life of Abraham Lincoln, and wrote his reminiscences, several of which are included in this collection. Anderson died on April 23, 1981, before completing a history of turn-of-the-century Sparta, on which he had been working.

Anderson and his wife had one son, Robert.

Scope and Contents note

Two manuscripts recount Anderson's military experiences, particularly while in Camp Custer, shipping to England and service in the vicinity of Archangel. Topics include day-to-day routine, sanitation, food, the cold, effects of the Spanish Flu and the travels from Russia to Grand Rapids. Volume 1 is handwritten, Volume 2 is a photo duplication of an original typescript at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

The remaining two manuscripts detail the Christmas customs and lifestyles of the early twentieth century Swedish immigrants living in West Michigan. A third document on the Swedish community was found and added in 2001.

The collection also contains a copy of "A Treatise on 'The Cootie'" written by Anderson while in North Russia, and a copy of "The Polar Bears: A Memoir," from The Grand River Valley Review (Fall/Winter 1982).

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department 1986

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Anne Riasch, 1986, accession number 1986.078; Library purchase, 1990, accession number 00.[1849].1.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Collection 33, Godfrey Anderson Photograph Collection

Additional Related Materials "The Strange, Sad Death of Sergeant Kenney : a personal story of heroism and loss during America's Russian Intervention of 1918-19 / by John Evangelist Walsh. In Wisconsin Magazine of History, Winter 2001-2002.

This article talks about the 339th Infantry, and with no direct reference to the 337th Field Hospital or Godfrey Anderson. It may be helpful in providing additional reference information, however, about the action and the groups involved.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Polar Bear Expedition (1918-1919).
- United States. Army. American Expeditionary Forces. Field Hospital, 337th.

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- Soviet Union -- History -- Allied intervention, 1918-1920

Subject(s)

- Swedish Americans -- Michigan -- History
- World War, 1914-1918

Series I. WWI Reminiscences, Polar Bears

Collection Inventory

Series I. WWI Reminiscences, Polar Bears

Scope and Contents note

This series includes his written remembrances of his experience in Northern Russia, as part of the 337th Field Hospital, 85th Division, in World War I. It also includes reference documents which further describe the experience of the national documented expedition.

	Box	Folder
The 337th Field Hospital in North Russia, 1918-1919, v.1 (Photocopy), n.d.	1	1
The 337th Field Hospital in North Russia, 1918-1919, v.1 (original), n.d. Formerly 947.064 H1 55	1	2
Conditions Governing Use note		
Please use the photocopy, in order to help us protect Andersons's original work.		
The 337th Field Hospital in North Russia, 1918 1919, v.2 (photocopy typescript from the Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library), n.d.	1	3
“The Polar Bears, a memoir / Godfrey Anderson” from Grand River Valley Review v. 4, no. 1, Fall/Winter 1982.	1	4

Series II. Personal Reminiscences

Reference articles on the Polar Bears	1	5
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Series II. Personal Reminiscences**Scope and Contents note**

This series includes his remembrances of the Swedish community in the Grand Rapids area.

	Box	Folder
Christmas in the Country and the Yulefest at Axel Carlson's (1900-1920), 1966	1	6

Christmas as the Old-Time Swedes Observed It, 1965	1	7
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“Early Days in the Swedish Mission Movement in Grand Rapids”, n.d. 00. [1849].1	1	8
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Series III. Facsimile Reference materials.**Scope and Contents note**

This series includes additional information about Anderson and other written works by him.

	Box	Folder
Biographical.	1	9

“A Treatise on ‘The Cootie’” Clipping. Photocopy. The Sentinel. Mar. 9/10, 19xx	1	10
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