

Grand Rapids History and Special Collections

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding Aid for the

Godfrey J. Anderson Manuscripts

Collection # 023

September 2009 version

Abstract

The original & facsimile manuscripts in this collection were written by Godfrey J. Anderson (1895-1981) of the Grand Rapids, Michigan area. It 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 Bears Expedition to Russia, 1918-1919. Anderson was a member of the 337th Field Hospital, one of 4 units of the 85th Division sent for this special service, led by the 339th Infantry, and also including the 1st Battalion of the 310th Engineers, and the 337th Ambulance Co. 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. For additional information see the Bentley Historical Library Web Site at:

<http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/mhchome/polarb.htm>

Note: The GRPL Archives also includes Coll. 108, the 339th Ambulance Company Collection. This is not the same group that accompanied the 339th Infantry to Russia, though it may have been by chance that the 337th went instead.

Collection #: 023

Accession #: 1986.078 ; 00.[1849].1

Donor: Anne Riasch, 1986; Library purchase, 1990.

Span dates: 1982-1986

Processor: Original processing, Wendy K. Walker, 1986.

1990 purchase addition, Richard H. Harms, 1990.

Inventory, Andrea Stadt, Sept. 1999.

Addition from Dept. Reference book transfers, R. Mayne, 12/31/2001.

Finding aid revisions and additions, R. Mayne, Aug. 2002

Size: .21 Linear ft. (2.5 inches)

Search terms: Anderson, Godfrey.

Related Collections

Godfrey Anderson Photograph Coll. # 033

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.

Box Summary

<u>Box No.</u>	<u>Description of Contents</u>	<u>Box Description</u>
Box inventory 8/2009		
1	Reminiscences	Slim

NOTE: This collection was formerly included in a box which also housed Colls. 021, 024 & 025, but has grown into it’s own box in Aug. 20, 2002.

## Biography

Godfrey J. Anderson (b.14 November 1895; d.23 April 1981) was the only child of Swedish immigrant living in Sparta, Michigan. In 1905 the family moved briefly to Tennessee, but returned to the area to live with an uncle in Grand Rapids. Subsequently the family bought a farm in Ottawa County, 1 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 graduation from High School, Anderson worked on his father's farm until he was 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." Following the Bolshevik/German Peace Treaty in 1918, American soldiers were sent from England to Archangel to protect Allied supplies deposited there during the Czarist government. The 337th was part of this contingent sent to protect the supplies from Bolshevik attack.

After the war, Anderson returned to the family farm, shortly after beginning 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 in c.1963.

Anderson and his wife had one son, Robert. After retiring, Anderson spent a great deal of time pursuing his avocation for history. He collected a great deal on the life of Abraham Lincoln, pictorially documented West Michigan and the Grand River from its source to its mouth, and wrote his reminiscences, several of which are included in this collection.

## Series

The collection has been divided into three series:

### **Series I. World War I Reminiscences**

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.

### **Series II. Personal Reminiscences.**

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

### **Series III. Facsimile reference materials.**

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

## Scope and Content

Two manuscripts recount Anderson's military experiences, particularly while in Camp Custer, shipping to England and service in the vicinity of Archangel. Topics included 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 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).

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
		<b>Series I. WWI Reminiscences, Polar Bears</b>
1	1	"The 337th Field Hospital in North Russia, 1918-1919," v.1 (Photocopy), n.d.
1	2	"The 337th Field Hospital in North Russia, 1918-1919," v.1 (original), n.d. Formerly 947.064 H1 55 NOTE: Library patrons are requested to use the photocopy, in order to help us protect Anderson's original work.
1	3	"The 337th Field Hospital in North Russia, 1918 1919," v.2 (photocopy typescript from the Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library), n.d.
1	4	"The Polar Bears, a memoir / Godfrey Anderson" from Grand River Valley Review v. 4, no. 1, Fall/Winter 1982. Note: The original issue which is supposed to be in this collection is missing. No backlog of this issue exists, and a photocopy of the article has been supplied here instead. R. Mayne, Aug. 20, 2002.
1	5	Reference articles on the Polar Bears <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The Ignorant Armies / E.M. Halliday. N.Y. : Harper &amp; Brothers, n.d. Unidentified map pages only "North Russia, 1918-1919"</li><li>● "Polar Bear Unit Honors Its Dead". Detroit Free Press, Jun 1, 1976. Clipping. Photocopy.</li><li>● Doughboy Center : the story of the American Expeditionary Forces / presented by the Great War Society. Internet copy. <a href="http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/p_bear.htm">http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/p_bear.htm</a></li><li>● The Polar Bear Expedition : Manuscripts, Photographs, and Maps / Bentley Historical Library, Univ. of Mich. Internet copy. <a href="http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/mhchome/polarc.htm">http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/mhchome/polarc.htm</a></li><li>● The Polar Bear Expedition / Bentley Historical Library, Univ. of Mich. Internet copy. <a href="http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/mhchome/polarb.htm">http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/mhchome/polarb.htm</a></li><li>● Detroit's Polar Bears and their confusing war / Patricia Zacharias / the Detroit News. Internet copy. <a href="http://detnews.com/history/polar/polar.htm">http://detnews.com/history/polar/polar.htm</a></li></ul>

**Series II. Personal Reminiscences**

- 1 6 "Christmas in the Country and the Yulefest at Axel Carlson's (1900-1920)," 1966.
- 1 7 "Christmas as the Old-Time Swedes Observed It," 1965.
- 1 8 "Early Days in the Swedish Mission Movement in Grand Rapids", n.d.  
00.[1849].1 12/31/2001

**Series III. Facsimile Reference materials.**

- 1 9 Biographical.  
● Obituary for Anderson. No citation.
- 1 10 "A Treatise on 'The Cootie'" Clipping. Photocopy.  
The Sentinel. Mar. 9/10, 19xx