

Finding Aid to the Sveinung Anundsen Olsness Photograph Collection

Olsness, S. A. (Sveinung Anundsen), 1866-1954

Sveinung Anundsen Olsness Photograph Collection, 1880s to 1940s

147 photographic prints

1 tintype

1 cut silhouette

2 colored cards

3 card photograph albums (74 photographic prints)

Collection number: Photo Mss 220

Folio 28

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Links: Finding aid to the [Sveinung Anundsen Olsness Papers](#)

View collection in [Digital Horizons](#)

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Harold Aslakson, Sheyenne, N.D., 1954 (Acc 220).

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

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Citation: Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo (item number)

BIOGRAPHY

Sveinung Anundsen Olsness was born February 7, 1866 at Vinje, Telemark, Norway on the farm of Olsness near the shores of the great mountain lake, Totak. His parents were Aanund and Anne Olsness. After a limited education in Norway, and not being able to afford more, S.A. decided to immigrate to America with two uncles. He arrived in the spring of 1886 at Sheyenne, N.D. and spent his first years

here doing farm labor and working with the railroad crews. S.A. was careful with his money and soon was able to purchase a quarter section of land four miles west of the town of Sheyenne, North Dakota in partnership with his brother Aslak.

S.A. served as clerk for the Greenfield School District for several years in the 1890s and also as secretary for the Greenfield Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Company from 1893 to 1916. Appointment to a clerkship in the 1897 session of the North Dakota Legislature was his first introduction to politics. In 1914 Gov. L.B. Hanna appointed S.A. to a delegation to go to Norway to present a statue of Abraham Lincoln. In June 1916, S.A. was nominated to be a candidate for Insurance Commissioner of North Dakota. He was one of the originators of the Nonpartisan League. He served the state as Insurance Commissioner from his election in November 1916 until his defeat by the Langerites in 1934. As Commissioner S.A. was hard-working, intelligent and fair. An editorial in the *Bismarck Tribune* of 1945 states that "Mr. Olsness built the various state insurance businesses from nothing to powerful institutions. He nursed them through their formative years and did a great job for the people of the state in making them sound and stable."

After his political career he was engaged in a successful farming operation with his brother Aslak. He was also active in several national insurance organizations and a director of the Western Mutual Life Insurance Company of Fargo in 1935. In 1945 he was again Insurance Commissioner of North Dakota, this time being appointed by Gov. Fred Aandahl to serve until the outcome of impeachment proceedings against Commissioner Oscar E. Erickson.

Mr. Olsness was always an active spectator of political events and often wrote to various newspapers and magazines expressing his views, and also wrote a good deal of poetry. He died May 19, 1954 and was buried at Sheyenne, N.D. He never married.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Sveinung Anundsen Olsness Photographic Collection consists of 147 photographic prints, one tintype, one silhouette, and two colored cards. Formats include cabinet photographs, cartes de visite, studio prints, postcards, and snapshots. The collection contains three card photograph albums, which contain portraits from Norway and North Dakota. Each page of a card photograph album contains one to four spaces for cartes de visite or cabinet cards to be slipped into place. This photographic collection compliments the S.A. Olsness manuscript collection at the Institute (Mss 220) consisting of correspondence, diaries, some financial records, and various subject files. Many of the photographs in this collection have accompanying information as to the individuals, places, or to when the photograph was taken. A number of the photographs are unidentified. The collection is organized into two series: Subject and People & Portraits. Oversize images were placed together in box seven with a copy of each in the pertinent series and folder.

The [Subject Series](#) are arranged into four topics the Olsness farm, the North Dakota Insurance Department, miscellaneous, and Norway. The formats of the photographs vary from studio photographs to snapshots. Many of the studio photographs are of S.A. Olsness and other state officials during the period he served as North Dakota Insurance Commissioner, 1916 to 1934 and 1945. Larger photographs of the Olsness farm were possibly taken by a traveling photographer, since several are in commercial cardboard frames.

The farm file contains photographs of various activities on the Olsness farm in North Dakota. One picture is labeled Olsness-Totak farm. Totak was the name of the lake near the Olsness farm in Norway. A large

barn is pictured in the process of construction. That same barn, after its completion, is seen in the background of pictures of farm animals. There is also a threshing scene.

In the North Dakota Insurance Department file the photographs were professionally taken. There are pictures taken in the state capital of the office force from secretaries to officials. The office force is shown at their desks, which gives an idea of working conditions in the late teens or early 1920s at the capital.

The miscellaneous file contains two photographs of women homesteaders, Ambjorg Hagen and Margit Olsness (1909), and their "shacks." There are two photographs of insurance commissioners gathered at San Francisco (1926) and Mount Rainier (1924). One is labeled as a Convention of Insurance Commissioners. In a photograph that appears to have been taken on the steps of the First Congregational Church, S.A.O. is seated and the photograph is labeled Old Timers at 50th Anniversary, New Rockford, N.D.

The Norway file contains snapshots and cartes de visite of people and places in Norway. A souvenir viewbook received by S.A. Olsness October 30, 1916 contains mechanical prints of Telemark. It was printed by Normanns Kunstforlag, Oslo. Sixteen of the twenty-four prints remain in the viewbook. Two of the oversize images are from farms in Vinje, Telemark and are labeled.

The [Portraits and People Series](#) consists of snapshots, one tintype, cabinet cards, photographic postcards, and studio photographs. All of the snapshots are taken outdoors. Small snapshots taken of farms and people on their farms are throughout the collection. The figure in the tintype is not identified. The majority of the cabinet cards are in the albums. The photographic postcards are sprinkled throughout the files.

The Aslakson Family was related to S.A. Olsness. Sveinung Aslakson was an original settler of Sheyenne in 1884. He was an uncle to S.A. Olsness being his mother's brother. In the Aslakson Family file one photograph is identified as "Mrs. Howard Schmid, Oberon, N.D., maiden name Gudrun Aslakson." Another photograph is identified as "Mr. & Mrs. Steffen Aslakson."

The Olsness file contains portraits of S.A. Olsness and his brother, Aslak. One snapshot is of the two brothers and their vintage car in the early 1900s. There is a portrait of Miss Margit, S. A. and Aslak Olsness. One photograph of the brothers appears to have been taken at the North Dakota capital, possibly during S.A.'s second time as Insurance Commissioner in 1945. Of note, is a cut silhouette of S.A. Olsness done in 1908.

The people file has a variety of photographs. One of note is the "Wedding of Math. Halverson in 1897 or '98." There is another wedding party image but labeling is difficult to read. The photographs are labeled but the relationship to S.A. Olsness is unknown in most cases. One is of the Tolliev Midbo family at Camrose, Alberta, Canada

A file of state dignitaries contains varied photographs of men who served in public office for the state of North Dakota. Included are photographs of Governor Frazier, Joseph Kitchen, F.E. Tunell, Martin S. Hagan, O.H. Olson, A.T. Russell, Harold Hopton. Three group pictures are included one of which depicts the members of the Nonpartisan League 1917-18, a mock wedding, and a lunch with Governor Frazier by a large group of men and three women, taken likely in the governor's capitol office. Unidentified photographs are organized together in one file, and include of young children, mother and child, young woman and several of adult men.

The three card photograph albums contain over seventy cabinet photographs and cartes de visite. They include portraiture taken in Norway and North Dakota. Identification for many of them is written on the

album page. They are primarily of relatives and family, both in North Dakota and in Norway. Quite a number are of the Aslakson family. Other names represented include Hendrickson, Houkom, Lee, Halvorson, The Norway images are primarily cartes de visite. Location of Norwegian photographers include Skien, Christiania (Oslo), Notodden and Ovrebø. Quite a number of the cabinet photographs were done by C.T. Lee who operated a 'parlor photo car' at Fargo and Oberon.

BOX/FOLDER	CONTENTS (no. of images)
1/1	Finding aid and Biographical material
	Subject Series
1/2	Farm (15)
1/3	North Dakota Insurance Department (11)
1/4	Miscellaneous (11)
1/5	Norway (22)
	People & Portraits Series
2/6	Aslakson family (12)
2/7	Olsness (19)
2/8	People (42)
3/9	State dignitaries (12)
3/10	Unidentified people (6)
4	Card Photograph album (7)
5	Card Photograph Album (32)
6	Card Photograph Album (36)
7	Oversize photographs