

Finding Aid to the S. A. Olsness Papers

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

S. A. Olsness Papers, 1883-1954

3.2 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 220

Mss 1596.9

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Links: Finding Aid to the [S. A. Olsness Photograph Collection](#)

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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 4 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 1890's and also as secretary for the Greenfield Farmers Mutual.. Fire Insurance Company from 1893-1916. Appointment to a clerkship in the 1897 session of the 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 Nov. 1916 until his defeat by the Langerites in 1934. As Commissioner S.A. was hardworking, 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.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The **S.A. Olsness Papers** have been arranged into four series: Correspondence, Diaries, Financial records and Subject files.

The [Correspondence Series](#) is arranged chronologically, and contains both incoming and outgoing letters mainly during his years as Insurance Commissioner. The most complete years are 1917 through 1935. There is some correspondence from relatives in Norway especially in the early and late years. None has been translated. The main body of correspondence deals with Mr. Olsness' insurance position and the Nonpartisan League. In the latter years, of note, is correspondence from William Lemke, Gerald P. Nye, World Peace Agency, Norman Thomas, and the Socialist Party.

The [Diaries Series](#) covers mainly the latter half of Mr. Olsness' career. The 1897 diary is quite incomplete and includes various financial notes. The 1902-1903, 1907 diaries are from his two trips back to Norway and are a combination of Norwegian and English. The diaries beginning in 1925 are quite complete and are in English. They record daily events and have some financial notes.

The [Financial Records Series](#) are very scattered and include some records of his brother Aslak and Uncle Sven Aslakson. Of note are two account ledgers of the store operated by Mr. Olsness and his uncle Aslak in Sheyenne for 1899 and 1900.

The [Subject Files Series](#) contain a wide variety of information. Placed in oversize Mss 1596.9 is Olsness appointment by Governor Hanna to the Abraham Lincoln Statue Presentation Committee to represent the people of North Dakota at the presentation of the Lincoln statue at Christiania (Oslo), Norway in 1914. There is a five-page biographical sketch of Mr. Olsness from childhood to about 1907 and is quite complete. Although titled biography it appears to be autobiographical. There is a handwritten copy as well as typed copies in English and Norwegian. The biographies of Rauland, Vinje, Norway natives consists of several handwritten biographical sketches in Norwegian. The Lee Post Office location is near Aneta, N.D.

The newspaper clippings are quite extensive especially Mr. Olsness' letters to the editor and about his career as Insurance Commissioner. The Nonpartisan League file contains miscellaneous receipts, including the League Exchange, 1922 platform, By-laws (1932) and a call for meeting. The Askak Olsness material includes obituaries and a funeral memorial book. There are various poetry clippings and writings including various poems of Mr. Olsness. His speeches which are quite extensive consist mainly of typed copies with several handwritten drafts. Also of note is the summons in which Mr. Olsness is named a defendant, and the Thorsen campaign material for governor.

SEPARATIONS RECORD

The following non manuscript items were removed from the S. A. Olsness Papers and have been sent to the sections indicated.

Books (Library book collection, consult the main library catalog for call number and location)

- The Bank of North Dakota, Purpose, History and Organization, Laws...1920.
- Hints to North Dakota State Hail Adjusters, S. Hagen ... 1919.

Photographs (Institute Photo Mss 220)

- L. Hallstrom and Martin 197 items Various family members in Norway and United States, farm scenes from Sheyenne, North Dakota governmental officials, and in his state Insurance offices.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Biographical material, and Finding aid
	Correspondence Series
1/2	1883, 1897-1904
1/3	1907-1916

1/4	1917-1918
1/5	1919
1/6	1920
1/7	1921
1/8	1922
1/9	1923
1/10	1924
1/11	1925
1/12	1926
1/13	1927-1929
1/14	1930
1/15	1931
1/16	1932, Jan.-June
1/17	1932, July-Dec.
1/18	1933
1/19	1934
1/20	1935
1/21	1940, 1944-1945
1/22	1946-1948
1/23	1949-1951 , 1954
1/24	undated

Diaries Series

2/1	1897 (and financial ledger)
2/2	May 1902-May 1903 (Travelogue on Norway tour)
2/3	1907, May-Sept. (Travelogue on Norway tour)
2/4	1925
2/5	1926
2/6	1927
2/7	1928
2/8	1929
3/1	1930
3/2	1931
3/3	1932
3/4	1933
3/5	1934
3/6	1935
4/1	1936
4/2	1937
4/3	1938
4/4	1939
4/5	1940
4/6	1941
4/7	1942
5/1	1943
5/2	1944
5/3	1945
5/4	1946
5/5	1947
5/6	1948

5/7 1949
 5/8 1950 - April 1951
 6/1 1951, April - 1952, Jan.
 6/2 1952
 6/3 1953
 6/4 1954, Jan. - May 7

Financial Records Series

6/5 Ledger, 1899
 6/6 Ledger, 1900
 7/1 Ledger, 1901
 7/2 Ledger, 1916-1918, 1920, 1922, 1946 - Jan. 1954
 7/3 Ledger, 1936-1940
 7/4 Bank books, 1907-1915 (Aslak Olsness), 1915-1917 (S.A. Olsness)
 7/5 Miscellaneous financial papers, 1908-1953
 7/6 Property tax statements - Aslak Olsness, 1898-1902, 1909
 7/7 Property tax statements - Sven Aslakson, 1885-1920
 7/8 Property tax statements - Sven Aslakson, 1921-1937

Subject Files

Mss 1596.9 Abraham Lincoln Statue Presentation Committee appointment, 1914
 7/9 Biographical sketch
 7/10 Biographies of Rauland-Vinje, Telemark, Norway pioneers at Lee P.O. and Sheyenne, N.D
 7/11 Campaign material - S.A. Olsness
 7/12 Campaign material - Miscellaneous
 7/13 Campaign returns, 1932
 7/14 Equity Cooperative Elevator Co. of Sheyenne, N.D., 1949-1953
 7/15 Letters to the editor (drafts)
 7/16 Political material Miscellaneous
 7/17 Newspaper clippings North Dakota politics
 7/18 Newspaper clippings S.A. Olsness letters to the editor
 8/1 Newspaper clippings S.A. Olsness
 8/2 Newspaper clippings Miscellaneous
 8/3 Nonpartisan League, 1919-1932
 8/4 Norwegian travel information, 1902-1904
 8/5 Notebook of legislative suggestions for insurance, 1921
 8/6 Nye, Sen. Gerald P.
 8/7 Olsness, Aslak
 8/8 Pamphlets
 8/9 Poetry - Miscellaneous
 8/10 Poetry - Norwegian
 8/11 Poetry - S.A. Olsness