

Relatives meet photographer through collection

Christine Jackson Staff Correspondent, Rapid City [South Dakota] Journal, August 13, 1989

Fifty people gathered in Rapid City Aug. 2 to honor a deceased relative very few of them even knew about. But the Sioux people living on the Rosebud Reservation around the turn of the century knew him well. Evidence of his relationship with them was displayed for all the relatives to enjoy.

John A. Anderson, a Swedish immigrant photographer and the honored relative, spent most of his life on the Rosebud Reservation photographing the people and how they lived. An exhibit of many of Anderson's photographs helped his Swedish and American relatives get to know the man.

The people responsible for the photographic collection and the reunion itself were not relatives. Claes and Eva Jacobson, a Swedish couple, were very interested in the Sioux Indian culture. In 1985, the Jacobsons began work on a historical research project to locate information about Swedish photographers who had settled in the United States.



"John A. Anderson was the most interesting and most famous one I came across, so I continued to research him and his work," Claes said.

A trip to the United States took the Jacobsons to the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. There they found a collection of 100 original glass plates (photographs) of Anderson's reservation work. Anderson's wife had sold the plates to the society upon his death, because Anderson's family had homesteaded near Fort Niobrara (Neb.) in the 1870s.

Jacobson was impressed with the photographic collection and told the society he wanted to bring the collection 'to Sweden for the Swedish people, who were interested in Indian culture.

Jacobson obtained permission to make contact prints from the original plates to use in a Swedish exhibit. The only stumbling block was raising money to cover the cost of the undertaking.



The Jacobsons soon convinced 20 Swedish and two American companies to donate money for the project. The prints were framed, posters printed and catalogs distributed throughout Sweden.

The traveling exhibit, entitled "The Rosebud Sioux - A People in Transition," had its preview showing in August 1986 in Falkenberg, Sweden, Anderson's birthplace.

The exhibit has met with great success. It has been covered extensively by the Swedish media and has been shown in 22 museums throughout the country. The exhibit is booked until August 1991. "About 300,000 Swedes have viewed the exhibit, and in a country of only 8 million people, that's quite a remarkable number in such a short time," Claes said.

Some of the Swedes who viewed the exhibit were Anderson's relatives and the Jacobsons became acquainted with them. They corresponded and soon relatives on both sides of the Atlantic were excited about the exhibit.

One American relative the Jacobsons became friends with was Elizabeth Anderson Culver, Anderson's niece and the oldest living Anderson descendant in the United States.

"My father was John's brother," Culver said. "They were both very young when they came to America with their parents in 1869 to escape poverty and hunger in Sweden. My husband and I had always kept in touch with John and his wife, especially during their later years."



Culver told Jacobson how she wished more of the relatives, who didn't know Anderson and his work, could see the exhibit and get to know the other relatives. Jacobson suggested a family reunion. Culver and her husband helped organize the reunion, which brought together 11 Swedes and 39 Americans -- many for the first time.