

# George Brun Sandback Oral History Interview, 1982

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Sandback, George Brun
<b>Title</b>	George Brun Sandback Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 10 photographs 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t155
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with George Brun Sandback, a Norwegian immigrant.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">Pacific Lutheran University, Archives and Special Collections</a> Archives and Special Collections Pacific Lutheran University 12180 Park Avenue South Tacoma, Washington 98447 Telephone: 253-535-7586 Fax: 253-535-7315 <a href="mailto:archives@plu.edu">archives@plu.edu</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	The oral history collection is open to all users.
<b>Additional Reference Guides</b>	
<b>Languages</b>	English
<b>Sponsor</b>	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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## Biographical Note

George Sandback was born on January 24, 1898 in Sandbakk, Norway, which is five Norwegian miles north of Bodø. His parents were Edward Isakson and Andrea Gabrielsen. Andrea died when George was nine years old, and Edward later remarried to a woman named Petra. There were seven boys and three girls in George's family after both marriages. The family lived on the Sandback farm, and Edward fished during the winters. George went to school for eight years, and when he was fourteen; he went up north to fish and sail. He was in Russia when World War I broke out and was afraid that Norway was going to get involved in the war as well. He left for the United States when he was seventeen. Once in America, George went to North Dakota and began working for his stepmother's brother, Teodor Olavsen. George was not particularly fond of North Dakota, and he only stayed there for eighteen months. In October 1916, George went to Tacoma, Washington, where his sister lived. From there, George went up to Seattle and found work on a boat. He signed up to be a sailor and a fisherman, and stayed on this boat for four summers. During the winters, he stayed with his grandparents on Hartstene Island and studied the English language. In 1918, George attended Navigation School in Tacoma,

which lasted for two weeks. All together, he spent thirty-eight summers fishing in Alaska. George was married twice before meeting his current wife, Gladys Iversen, and had one daughter, Georgia Herman. Gladys is from Iowa, and they were married in 1949. At the time of the interview, George was not active in church and no longer belonged to Nordlandslaget; he only belonged to the Masons. George returned to Norway in 1966 and 1972 and was proud of his Norwegian heritage. Nevertheless, he lived in the United States for so long that he really felt like an American.

### Lineage

Full Name: George Brun Sandback. Father: Edward Isaksen. Mother: Andrea Gabrielsen. Maternal Grandfather: Gabriel. Maternal Grandmother: Bergette. Brothers and Sisters: Johan Isaksen, Edmund Isaksen, Elfrida Petersen, Joseph Isaksen, Olaf Isaksen, Teodor Isaksen, Inga Walley (?). Spouse: Gladys Iversen.

## Content Description

This interview was conducted with George Sandback on March 25, 1982 in Tacoma, Washington. It provides information on family background, emigration, work, marriage, and Norwegian heritage. The interview also contains an announcement of George's 85th birthday from the Western Viking (1983) and photographs of George fishing, George as a foreman on a pile driver, George with his brother Teodor and parents, and George at the time of the interview. The interview was conducted in English.

## Use of the Collection

### Restrictions on Use

There are no restrictions on use.

## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

The Oral History collection project was started during an experimental course on Scandinavian Women in the Pacific Northwest. Students in the course were encouraged to interview women and learn about their experiences as immigrants to the United States. The project was continued and expanded with support from the president's office and by grants from the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, from the Joel E. Ferris Foundation and the Norwegian Emigration Fund of the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project was directed by Dr. Janet E. Rasmussen. The collection was transferred to the Archives and Special Collections Department.

### Acquisition Information

### Related Materials

To search and view Pacific Lutheran University's digitized images, visit our [Digital Assets Website](#)

### Processing Note

The interview was conducted by Inger Nygaard Carr using a cassette recorder. A research copy was also prepared from the original. To further preserve the content of the interview, it is now being transferred to compact disc. We deliberately did not transcribe the entire interview because we want the researchers to listen to the interviewee's own voice. The transcription index highlights important aspects of the interview and the tape counter numbers noted on the Partial Interview Transcription are meant as approximate finding guides and refer to the location of a subject on the cassette/CD. The recording quality is good

The collection was transcribed by Mary Sue Gee, Julie Peterson and Becky Husby.

## Bibliography

Rasmussen, Janet Elaine. *New Land New Lives: Scandinavian Immigrants to the Pacific Northwest* Tacoma, Washington University of Washington Press 1993

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

The partial interview transcription highlights important aspects of the interview. Numbers may be used as guides to important subjects. Two numbers separated by a slash indicate that the first number is for cassette and the second for CD.

Container(s)	Description
Cassette	
155, side 1	018: George Brun Sandback. Born in Sandbakk, five Norwegian miles north of Bodø, Norway on January 24, 1898.
155, side 1	035: PARENTS Edward Isaksen, the name Sandback comes from the place. George did come over with the name Isakson but changed it because his sister had taken the name Sandback. His mother's name was Andrea Gabrielsen.
155, side 1	075: GRANDPARENTS Maternal, Gabriel was a carpenter who built the church in Bodø. Gabriel Olsen, they changed their name to Ålberg when they came to the U.S. This was the name of the place that they were from. Their daughter had sent for them. These daughters lived on Hartstene Island from 1905.
155, side 1	117: These grandparents came to stay with their daughters. They died in this country. One daughter married Albert Rohm (?). They had a farm on this island.
155, side 1	142: George's parents never came to the U.S. Mother died when he was nine. His father remarried.

Container(s)	Description
155, side 1	153: MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER Bergette.
155, side 1	158: PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS Grandfather died young in an accident. His name was Isak. This grandfather was a farmer and a fisherman.
155, side 1	189: Father was farming. He had the Sandback farm. Fished in the winter in Lofoten. Worked the farm in the summer. The property had lots of mountains birch trees and a lake in the back part. Planted a lot of fir and pine. One of George's brothers has the farm now. There were seven brother and three girls.
155, side 1	237: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Three brothers next to George are retired. They were fishermen and had a farm to tend to in the summer. Johan lives in Nordfold now in an old peoples home. Edmund lives in Bodo with his family. Had a brother who came to the U.S. in 1930 but he died young of cancer. Olaf has the family farm now. Teodor fishes moved to Nordfold with his son. Elfrida Petersen, his sister is retired. His other sister, Inga Walley (?), she had come to the U.S. Her husband was killed in Alaska. Another sister stayed in Norway and was married. Olaf, Elfrida and Teodor were from father's second marriage.
155, side 1	380: Father's second wife was Petra. George was about 13 years old.
155, side 1	399: SCHOOL Several places that they taught. Sometimes he had school at Sandbakk, other times at Stavfjord.
155, side 1	415: CHURCH Was in Nordfjord, two Norwegian miles away. Rowed to church in a boat. It was all mountains and fjords. Stayed in Nordfold when they took confirmation. Stayed with his father's cousin.
155, side 1	449: Went to school for eight years. No money to go to school after grade school. Went to Navigation school in the U.S. in 1918.
155, side 1	464: In the winter they still went to school. Went to church in the winter, had to cross the fjord.
155, side 1	494: CHRISTMAS Always looked forward to Christmas. On Christmas Day they could not even leave home. On the second day of Christmas they went out visiting. The

Container(s)	Description
	Christmas holiday lasted a couple of weeks. They did not go to church on Christmas Day.
155, side 1	522: SPECIAL CHRISTMAS FOODS All kinds of goodies. Lefse, julekake, waffles, and gumma. On Christmas Eve, they had lutefisk. Christmas Day was mostly a smörgåsbord.
155, side 1	558: WORK Worked a lot on the farm when he was young, especially when his father was fishing. Also cut and sold wood.
155, side 1	567: AT age 14 he was on his own up north, fishing and sailing. Was up in Russia when WWI broke out. Describes this. All the longshoremen in Russia were women. All the women had for clothes were gunnysacks, lots of poverty in that nation. This was in 1914. Men in Russia were farming and working in the woods.
155, side 1	620: Found out the war had broken out when they returned from Russia. Everything in the North Sea had been sunk. The North Sea was full of submarines.
155, side 1	650: Tells more about this experience. Went on a big boat herring fishing in 1914.
155, side 1	677: Got ready to come to the U.S. Afraid Norway was going to get in the way. Had to have lots of papers fixed up from the church, sheriff. Left Norway in the middle of January. Father had already left for Lofoten. Was 17 when he left. Left the 15th of January.
155, side 1	714: Took the Bergensfjord. The war was still going on. Passenger boats did not have any trouble getting through the water.
155, side 1	750: Grandparents and a sister were in the U.S. Stopped off in North Dakota where he knew a guy.
155, side 1	755: ELLIS ISLAND No trouble. Thousands of people were going through.
155, side 1	765: TOUGHEST THING Was not knowing the language. Seemed to get along fine. While in North Dakota, he did not learn a word of English because everyone spoke Norwegian. Went to work for his stepmother's brother in North Dakota. His

Container(s)	Description
	name was Teodor Olavsen. Did farm work there. Learned to handle horses. Used teams of horses. Had 160 acres.
155, side 1	804: BOAT TRIP The trip took about 9-10 days. Cost about \$200.
155, side 1	816: TRAIN TRIP Seemed long. Stopped in every hamlet that there was. Bought food when they stopped.
155, side 1	832: FIRST IMPRESSIONS Everything was strange and big. Nothing but prairie in North Dakota. Stayed there for 18 months. Did not like North Dakota.
155, side 1	848: TACOMA Came to Tacoma in October 1916. War was still on in Europe.
155, side 1	875: WORK Got on a boat in Seattle, the St. Paul, a 300 ft. long boat. It took people up to work in the cannery and supplies up. George signed up to be an A.B.C. man, a full sailor. He was 19 at this time. Had to sign up as a sailor and a fisherman. Describes of the things he did. Was on this boat for four summers.
155, side 1	914: George's job was on the topsails, 185 ft. from the deck. Had to set the sails. Fished for salmon. Worked with Norwegians, Englishmen, and Danes.
155, side 1	944: Had practiced the language through the winter so he could speak better. Spoke English on the boat. Stayed with his grandparents on Hartstene Island during the winter. His sister was working in Tacoma and helped him get to his grandparents. She met him at the train depot.
155, side 1	958: FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE WEST COAST Better than the Midwest. Life was the water, born and raised on the water in Sandbakk. Alaska looks more like Norway than here. Trees and fjords in Alaska look more like Norway. Felt at home anywhere he went. He was never homesick.
155, side 1	982: Put in 38 summers in Alaska. Worked for the Northwestern Co. to being with, then worked for several other companies. Was foreman for Northwestern for six years.
155, side 1	1000: NAVIGATION SCHOOL

Container(s)	Description
	In 1918 he went to navigation school. They did not have officers for all the ships that they were building. Took lessons in Tacoma. Three Norwegians took this course for about two weeks. Describes some of the things he learned.
155, side 1	1025: In the winter he worked on steamers. Twice he went to the Orient. Once to Chile with a load of lumber.
155, side 1	1041: Sailors ran a strike, which lasted for thirteen years. This was the end of navigation for George. He did not want to be a scab so he quit. This was in 1921.
155, side 1	1053: Went to work east of the mountains and did work on a farm. Began making \$2 a day, plus room and board. When he left he was making \$9 a day. There was a widow that begged George to take over the farm. He wanted to come back to the coast. He went back to Alaska to go fishing.
155, side 1	1066: MARRIAGES Had two different marriages when he was in Alaska. When he came back from Alaska there was somebody in his place. His first marriages cost him two houses and \$6,000.
155, side 1	1072: Met current wife up at Valhalla, Gladys Iversen. She is from Iowa. Was young when she came to Washington. They married in 1949.
155, side 1	1087: CHILDREN One from a former marriage, Georgia Herman. Gladys has two daughters. Georgia's husband works for the penitentiary. Gladys's daughters are both married. One husband is Richard Evans, a commercial artist. The other is Donald Cox.
155, side 1	1130: Tacoma had always been his stopover place ever since he came out to the West Coast.
155, side 2	SIDE II:
155, side 2	016: Tells a bit about his first wives. Have had several homes in Tacoma. Had a house in Everett because his second wife was from there.
155, side 2	050: CHURCH

Container(s)	Description
	Not active in any church. Had enough of that when he went to school. Had two hours of Bible when he was in school in Norway.
155, side 2	065: SCANDINAVIAN ORGANIZATIONS Belongs to Nordlandslaget. Quit that. Only lodge he belongs to is the Masons. Describes why he did not like the Nordlandslaget.
155, side 2	114: TRIPS TO NORWAY 1966 and 1972. In 1966, he met his brother and sister he had never seen. His sister was a grandmother.
155, side 2	139: Flew back both times. Talks about their first trip on Scandinavian Airlines.
155, side 2	181: CHANGES Did not even know Sandbakk. Father used to have goats that would eat brush all the time. Now there is much brush and vegetation because there are no goats. Area is full of trees. Sell lumber now for plywood and firewood. Birch makes beautiful plywood. The language has changed too. When George left Norway people spoke Danish because they had been under Denmark for so long. Sandbakk still had the old language.
155, side 2	286: George is not sorry he left Norway.
155, side 2	299: Not ashamed of being Norwegian. Has been here for 67 years. Really feels he is an American.
155, side 2	315: Person is a person, no difference between nationalities. Some bad people and some good. First time he saw a black person was in Chicago, he talked Norwegian. He was a shoe shiner in Chicago. He had been sailing on a Norwegian ship this is how he learned the Norwegian language.
155, side 2	365: Did not speak Norwegian in the home. Daughter regrets it. Talks about trips children have taken. One trip to Norway, they liked the people.
155, side 2	440: SPEAKS IN NORWEGIAN A few words.
155, side 2	459: Wife could understand Norwegian when they traveled over there. Mentions visiting a niece in Narvik. She taught Gladys Norwegian.



Container(s)	Description
155, side 2	529: THINGS DIFFERENT IN NORWAY THAN THE U.S. They eat maybe 5-6 meals days.
155, side 2	574: GRANDCHILDREN He has four. Gladys has six grandchildren. He names his grandchildren. Tom is married and has children. He works for a tugboat company. Has captain's license on the boat.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Christmas  
 Confirmation  
 Education--Norway  
 Emigration and immigration  
 Family--Norway  
 Fishing  
 Freemasonry  
 Marriage service  
 Norway -- Social conditions - 1945  
 Norwegian language  
 Norwegian-Americans - Ethnic identity  
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs  
 Ocean travel  
 World War, 1914-1915

### Personal Names :

Sandback, George--Interviews  
 (creator)  
 Herman, Georgia  
 Iversen, Gladys  
 Gabrielsen, Andrea  
 Isaksen, Edward

### Corporate Names :

Bergensfjord (Steamship)  
 Nordlandslaget Nordlyset (Tacoma, Wash.)  
 Valhalla Lodge (Tacoma, Wash.)

### Family Names :

Gabrielsen family  
 Isaksen family  
 Iversen family  
 Sandback family

### Geographical Names :

North Dakota  
 Sandbakk (Norway)  
 Tacoma (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Farmers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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