

Margit Carlsen Johnson Oral History Interview, 1982

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Johnson, Margit Carlsen
Title	Margit Carlsen Johnson Oral History Interview
Dates	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
Quantity	2 file folders 1 sound cassette
Collection Number	t149
Summary	An oral history interview with Margit Carlsen Johnson, a Norwegian immigrant.
Repository	Pacific Lutheran University, Archives and Special Collections Archives and Special Collections Pacific Lutheran University 12180 Park Avenue South Tacoma, Washington 98447 Telephone: 253-535-7586 Fax: 253-535-7315 archives@plu.edu
Access Restrictions	The oral history collection is open to all users.
Additional Reference Guides	
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

Margit Carlsen Johnson was born on June 5, 1901 in Leines, Norway, a small town twenty-eight miles north of Bodø. She is one of seven children by Bergitte Danielsen and Ludvik Carlsen, who was a farmer and fisherman. Margit went to school until she was confirmed at age 15 and then stayed with a neighbor and worked until she was 18; she had gone to work on neighboring farms since she was 13. She then went to Bodø and worked in the canneries. An uncle had emigrated and while he was visiting Norway, he extended an invitation to her to live with him in the U.S. Six years after she started working in the canneries, she decided to emigrate and wrote to her uncle in 1924. She waited a year before leaving and left from home on a boat to Trondheim in July 1925, took a train from Oslo, and then took the "Bergensfjord" to Ellis Island. It took ten days to get from Oslo to New York and 5 days by train to get to Tacoma, where her uncle met her. Her uncle owned a boarding house in Tacoma, and her aunt helped her get a job in a fruit cannery in Sumner, WA. She also stayed with a Danish family, the Hansens, for seven months doing housework. She then got a job working in the kitchen for a herring company in Alaska and worked there for two summers; she also worked at Nalley's for a while. Her husband, Einok Johnsen, was a friend of her uncle's and had stayed in his hotel, the St. Francis

Hotel. Einok came to the U.S. from Bodø, Norway in 1911, at which time his name was changed from Johansen to Johnsen. They were married at the courthouse in 1927. Einok was a fisherman and a longshoreman and fished on the Bering Sea in Alaska during the summer; he died in 1954. Margit and Einok had one son, Earl; he was born on June 22, 1929 and died in 1958. Margit became a member of Daughters of Norway when she first came to the U.S., belongs to Bethlehem Lutheran Church, and now helps with Scandinavian Days. She visited Norway on 1948 and saw her parents, and her last trip was in 1978.

Lineage

Full Name: Margit Carlsen Johnson. Maiden Name: Margit Carlsen. Father: Ludvik Carlsen. Mother: Bergitte Danielsen Carlsen. Brothers and Sisters: Elbjørg Carlsen, Kåre Carlsen, Haakon Carlsen, Leif Carlsen, Einar Carlsen, Thorstein Carlsen. Spouse: Einok Johnsen. Children: Earl Johnsen.

Content Description

The interview was conducted with Margit Johnsen on March 11, 1982 in Tacoma, Washington. This interview contains information on family history, childhood home, living in a fishing family, Christmas traditions, church, climate in northern Norway, school, work in Norway, emigration, Ellis Island, train trip to Tacoma, language difficulties, work in the U.S., marriage and family, community involvement, trips back to Norway, and pride in Norwegian heritage. 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

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Processing Note

The interview was conducted by Morrene Nesvig 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

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/CD	
Cassette	
149, side 1	021: Margit Johnsen. Maiden name was Carlsen. Born on June 5, 1901 in a small town, four Norwegian miles north of Bodø, Norway. A Norwegian mile is equal to seven English miles. Used to go by boat everywhere. Home place is Aasjord, this is still a community.
149, side 1	117: PARENTS Ludvik Carlsen and Bergitte Danielsen. Father was a farmer. Did fishing in the wintertime and farmed in the summer.
149, side 1	163: Father was fishing from January to late April. He was gone all this time. This was in the Lofoten Islands. Mother stayed home with the children.
149, side 1	199: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Seven children. Elbjørg, Kaare, Haakon, Leif, Einar, and Thorstein. Three brother left Norway.
149, side 1	221: GRANDPARENTS

Container(s)	Description
	Does not remember seeing them and never heard about them. Mother was from a village farther south. Dad was from the area Margit was born.
149, side 1	253: Mother came to Aasjord as a tailor and then met her husband. Did men's tailoring.
149, side 1	297: Does not know anything about her name Carlsen. Tells where her mother's maiden name comes from. Husband changed his name from Johansen to Johnsen when he came to America. He was from Bodø.
149, side 1	350: CHILDHOOD HOME Lived close to the ocean. Mountains behind them. Sunsets were beautiful. Storms on the ocean were common. One brother lives in the home place. Always at the ocean fishing and swimming. Had their own boat and fished for food.
149, side 1	450: FISH Salted or dried it. Split and filleted it. Buried in it salt. Had a cellar underground to store their food. This past year (1982) the potatoes froze, first time this had happened. The fjord froze over this year too.
149, side 1	494: Storms on the fjord caused the fishermen to stay on shore some days. Many lost their lives. Always worried that their father may not return.
149, side 1	512: Hardship for the woman to raise families, they were used to it. They lived happily, never complained.
149, side 1	525: Children got wood from the woods, split it, and brought it in. They carried the water. Got the feed for the cows nine months out of the year.
149, side 1	537: Children started working when they were 6-7 years old. Grew potatoes and hay. Planted carrots and rutabagas in the summer. Diet was mostly fish and potatoes.
149, side 1	553: CHRISTMAS A fun time for everybody. Celebrated for a long time. Started Christmas Eve. First day of Christmas you could not visit anyone, had to stay home. Christmas Day was a family day. Father read the Bible at home.
149, side 1	585: CHURCH

Container(s)	Description
	Was one Norwegian mile from home. Every third week had church. Minister had two other places. One fellow with a big motorboat gathered up all the people in the community and took them to church.
149, side 1	624: CHRISTMAS Second day of Christmas was visiting day. Went around to everybody in the community. It was custom that you could not leave the home without getting something to eat. You were through all your work by noon on Christmas Eve. Dressed in the best clothes that they had.
149, side 1	668: DECORATED HOUSE FOR CHRISTMAS Had a tree decorated with baskets made of paper woven together. Had candles on the tree.
149, side 1	694: EASTER Easter was an important holiday. Celebrated Thursday and Friday before Easter. Had first and second Easter days.
149, side 1	710: CHRISTMAS FOOD Did not have meat very often because slaughter was in the fall. Had a little meat at Christmas. Baked cookies, lefse. No lutefisk at her home.
149, side 1	733: CLIMATE IN NORTHERN NORWAY Had kerosene lamps when it was dark. Sun starts shining again in late January. By June there is all light. People are not that affected by the change in night and day. Did a lot of spinning, weaving, and knitting. Were self-sufficient.
149, side 1	775: Skied most of the time because of the snow. Went to school by skis. Had school for three weeks at a time and then were home for three weeks. Teacher had many places to teach. This all the teaching she had. Went until she was confirmed, age 15.
149, side 1	806: Went out to work on neighboring farms since she was 13 years old. Stayed with a neighbor and worked until she was 18.
149, side 1	832: Went to Bodø to work. Gives an account of her uncle who went to America. They passed through Bodø on a visit, her uncle gave her invitation to go to America. She had been working in Bodø for six years before she decided to go to America. She had worked in the canneries.
149, side 1	880:

Container(s)	Description
	In 1924 she wrote to her uncle in America. She did not like it anymore in Norway. She could not see a future in Norway. There were many immigrants going.
149, side 1	894: Waited for a year before she left. Came in July 1925. Margit knew many people who were leaving Norway.
149, side 1	913: Did not know anything about America before she came. Uncle sent a ticket.
149, side 1	922: Left from home on a boat to Trondheim then took a train to Oslo. She did not think much about leaving. She traveled alone.
149, side 1	941: Took the Bergensfjord. Was sick the first day. Shared a room with two others. Food was okay. All Norwegian immigrants on the boat.
149, side 1	956: Seeing the Statute of Liberty for the first time. It was early Saturday morning.
149, side 1	984: ELLIS ISLAND Went by ferry from Ellis Island to the main land. It was dirty. Talks about the differences between the Norwegian immigrants and the Italian immigrants. Tells about an experience she had where she was quite scared. First time she saw black people.
149, side 1	1034: Took ten days to cross the Atlantic. All immigrants went through Ellis Island. No examination. Had to have a head tax of \$25.
149, side 1	1059: Mentions seeing the skyscraper in New York and the Statue of Liberty. Did not know the meaning behind the Statue at that time.
149, side 1	1072: TRAIN TRIP Got on the Southern Pacific. People helped her get on the right train.
149, side 2	045: TRAIN TRIP Miserable time because it was so hot in July. Went through the southern states, changed trains in Chicago. Her and a friend were the only ones from the ship to get on this southern line. Someone helped them get on the right train. Margit had two suitcases with her.
149, side 2	160 :

Container(s)	Description
	Her friend warned her not to go with anyone. A girl approached her and found her something to read. She brought her four magazines. Her friend had read about white slavery, so she was scared. They were so dirty when they reached Tacoma.
149, side 2	246: LANDED IN TACOMA Uncle was there to meet her. Took five days from New York to Tacoma. Sat up the whole trip.
149, side 2	291: Had language difficulties on the train. They did not understand about money. Her friend had a package from Ellis Island full of everything: crackers, bread, and summer sausage. Bought sandwiches on the train. Met up with people in Portland, who they knew from the boat. Her friend's name was Osbjornson. They met in Oslo. He was from Bodø.
149, side 2	364: Uncle had a boarding house. He used to have a hotel on 17th. Then they had a rooming house on 11th and J. Her uncle's name was Timmermo.
149, side 2	400: Started working in Sumner and worked in a cannery with fruit. Her aunt helped get this job. She took the bus out everyday.
149, side 2	424: HOUSEWORK Stayed with one family for seven months, the Hansen's. They were Danish. Roland Hansen had an insurance company. Margit could speak Danish. She never liked housework, liked the outdoors better.
149, side 2	472: Heard of someone who went to Alaska. Went to Seattle for work in Alaska and worked with the herring company. Mostly Norwegians up there. Margit got picked to work in the kitchen, better pay. She did the gibbing of the herring. Took the guts out and salted it.
149, side 2	553: Had monthly wages in the kitchen, cooked for the men. They made herring meal, oil and salted herring. She did the dished when they were all through. Spoke Norwegian in the camp. Her best friend married the head cook. Margit worked two summers in Alaska. Worked for Nalley's for a while.
149, side 2	617: LEARNING ENGLISH Did not learn much at first because she worked where Norwegian and Danish was spoken. When she first got a radio this helped her to learn the language. Learned from her own child.

Container(s)	Description
149, side 2	655: Margit has always felt at home in this country. She was on her own early in Norway.
149, side 2	674: EARLY TACOMA Did not like the way they handled the horses here. She worked hard when she came to America.
149, side 2	701: DAYS OF HOUSEWORK Made breakfast, cleaning, made beds, took a whole day to iron. All the kids went to Annie Wright Seminary. They had uniforms that had to be ironed and starched. Fixed lunch for the girls. Cooked dinner and washed clothes.
149, side 2	735: Woman in the house did not do much where she was. She sat upstairs.
149, side 2	759: Had half of Thursday and half of Sunday off. Usually never got off until the middle of the afternoon.
149, side 2	761: WAGES Started out with \$40 a month plus room and board. Got a raise to \$45 a month. She quit to go to Alaska.
149, side 2	812: MEETING HUSBAND He was a friend of her uncle's. Einok Johnsen, he came to America in 1911 from Norway. He had stayed at her uncle's hotel, the St. Francis Hotel. They were married in 1927. They went to the courthouse.
149, side 2	843: Bought a home after they were married a week. On 38th and F Street. Tore down the house in 1965 for a road.
149, side 2	862: Husband was a fisherman and a longshoreman. He went to the Bering Sea in Alaska during the summer. He was gone a lot.
149, side 2	884: Did not work after she was married except for a friend once and a while.
149, side 2	890: CHILDREN Earl Johnsen died in 1958.
149, side 2	896: SCANDINAVIAN COMMUNITY

Container(s)	Description
	Daughters of Norway, became a member when she first came. Have done so many things. Used to take baked goods to the wounded soldiers at Madigan. A service club. Now helps with Scandinavian Days. Tacoma is the biggest Daughters group on the West Coast.
149, side 2	954: Used to do demonstrating of making Norwegian foods. Once she made fish pudding.
149, side 2	996: ROLE OF THE DAUGHTERS Meant an awful lot to her. She has met many friends. Has grown in size lately.
149, side 2	1025: Husband was a member of the Sons of Norway but he was gone a lot so he did not take part in much. He passed away in 1954.
149, side 2	1033: CHURCH Belongs to Bethlehem Lutheran.
149, side 2	1039: TRIPS BACK TO NORWAY In 1948, 23 years after she left. Lots of fun. Boat was crowded because everybody was going home after the war. Saw her parents in 1948. Hard to speak Norwegian when she first went back. Last trip was in 1978.
149, side 2	1092: Her brother has visited her in Tacoma. She still keeps in contact with relatives there.
149, side 2	1103: NORWEGIAN HERITAGE "Means everything to you." Proud of her language.
149, side 2	1114: Being a Norwegian means a lot to her. A good feeling you have. She also feels American.
149, side 2	1127: SPEAKS A LITTLE NORWEGIAN Table prayer, always says this before meals. Go to top Maintained by archives@plu.edu © 2002-2003 Pacific Lutheran University

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas

Emigration and immigration

Family--Norway

Naturalization
Norway--Social conditions--1945-
Norwegian-Americans--Ethnic identity
Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs
Ocean travel
Railroad travel

Personal Names :

Carlsen, Margit --Interviews
(creator)
Carlsen, Bergitte Danielsen
Carlsen, Ludvik
Johansen, Einok
Johnsen, Earl
Johnsen, Einok
Johnsen, Margit

Corporate Names :

Bergensfjord (Steamship)
Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Tacoma, Wash.)
Daughters of Norway (U.S.) Embla Lodge #2 (Tacoma, Wash.)
Ellis Island (N.J. and N.Y.)

Family Names :

Carlsen family
Danielsen family
Johansen family
Johnsen family

Geographical Names :

Bodø (Norway)
Leines (Norway)
Mosjøen (Norway)
Sumner (Wash.)
Tacoma (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Cannery workers
Domestics
Tailors

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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