

Kole Skaflestad Oliver Oral History Interview, 1983

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Oliver, Kole Skaflestad
Title	Kole Skaflestad Oliver Oral History Interview
Dates	1983 (inclusive) 1983 1983
Quantity	2 file folders 2 sound cassette
Collection Number	t227-228
Summary	An oral history interview with Kole Skaflestad Oliver, 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

Kole Oliver was born Kolbjørn Andreason Oliver Skaflestad on March 25, 1905 in Naustdal, Norway. His parents were Andreas Skaflestad and Karline Knutsonsdatter Herstad, and there were eight children in the family including Kole: Aslaug, Ottar, Kolbjørn, Helga, Alf, Maalfrid, Audun, and Gunnhild. Kole's father was a farmer, livestock buyer, and veterinarian, and they lived on a large farm. Kole began school when he was six and graduated from the eighth grade when he was fourteen. After graduation, he was confirmed and began working on the farm. He also attended carpentry school, which lasted for two years. In April 1923, Kole decided to immigrate to America, where he hoped to make a better living for himself. Upon arrival to America, he changed his name so it would be easier to pronounce and traveled to Kent, WA, where his aunt and uncle, Klara Ulleland and Abraham Skaflestad, lived. Abraham was a lumber engineer and had a job waiting for Kole when he arrived. Kole lived in a logging camp, where he split wood and loaded carts, making \$4 a day. At this time, Klara was pregnant, and she and Abraham decided to leave the camp. Kole stayed there for another month and a half and then moved to Seattle, where he found a construction job. He kept this job for six months and then went back to the woods. In 1927, Kole organized his own taxi cab business in the Tacoma

area. He remained in the business for over fifty years, and at its peak, the business had eighty-four employees. In the beginning years of his business, Kole made a lot of trips to Aberdeen, WA, which was where he met his wife, Violet Johnson. Violet was half Swedish-Finn and half Norwegian. They were married in 1931 and had their daughter, Marlene Dawson, the following year. Kole has been quite involved in community activities, including the Sons of Norway, Scottish Rite, and Shrine. He and his family spoke Norwegian at their home everyday and kept up with Norwegian customs to some extent. Kole's hobbies include fishing in Alaska and traveling to Norway. He had returned to Norway 15-16 times.

Lineage

Full Name: Kolbjørn Andreason Oliver Skaflestad. Father: Andreas Skaflestad. Mother: Karlina Knutsonsdatter Herstad. Brothers and Sisters: Aslaug Skaflestad, Ottar Skaflestad, Helga Skaflestad, Alf Skaflestad, Maalfrid Skaflestad, Audun Skaflestad, Gunnhild Skaflestad. Spouse: Violet Johnson. Children: Marlene Dawson.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Kole Oliver on January 30, 1983 in Kent, Washington. It contains information on family background, emigration, work, marriage and family, community activities, and 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

Processing Note

The interview was conducted by Janet Rasmussen 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	
227, side 1	010: FAMILY BACKGROUND Kole Oliver was born on March 25, 1905 and baptized Kolbjoern Andreason Oliver in Naustdal, Sogn og Fjordane, Norway. Kole was born at Naustdal where his parents lived on the Skaflestad farm. He changed his name when he got to America, so it would be easier to pronounce.
227, side 1	082: PARENTS His father was Andreas and his mother was Karlina Knutsonsdatter Herstad. The family has deep roots in Naustdal; the family tree has been traced back to the 1500's.
227, side 1	120: BROTHERS AND SISTERS There were eight children in the family: Aslaug, Ottar, Kolbjoern, Helga, Alf, Maalfrid, Audun, and Gunnhild.
227, side 1	156: GRANDPARENTS Kole remembers that his paternal grandfather died of shock in 1909 after two of his close friends died. His grandmother died in 1912 having lived on the farm with Kole's family after her husband died.
227, side 1	207: FAMILY LIFE Kole's father was a farmer, livestock buyer, and a vet. They had a large farm with a "seter"; Kole and his grandmother would spend the summer there. Grandmother would cook rommegroet and rommeask, whole milk soured in an ash container. The name Skaflestad comes from way back possibly meaning

Container(s)	Description
	hanging place or snowdrifts. There were numerous thieves in the area in the old days, and the way to deal with them was hanging.
227, side 1	<p>328: CHRISTMAS</p> <p>His family built a new house on the farm when Kole was growing up. He remembers spending his childhood on the farm fishing in the nearby river. He caught enough fish to feed the whole family. His mom usually fried or boiled it. The family had sheep and calves on the farm. Christmas was the high point of the year. There was always lots of baking, for example, potatocakes. Kole and his brothers and sisters would earn money for Christmas by picking and selling blueberries and lingonberries ("tytteb'r") in the fall after haying.</p>
227, side 1	<p>385: SCHOOL AND CONFIRMATION</p> <p>Kole started school at the age of 6 walking four and a half miles from his house. It took 45 minutes. In the winter, they skied to school. The kids had chores to do when they got home: feed and water the cattle, fill the wood box, and study. They studied by stove light at night. Kole graduated from the 8th grade when he was 14 years old, and he was confirmed that summer. He stayed the summer at church to attend the classes.</p>
227, side 1	<p>426: WORK</p> <p>After Kole finished school he worked on the farm and went to carpentry school for two years (woodcarving, designing, and carpentry).</p>
227, side 1	<p>445: EMIGRATION</p> <p>Kole's reason for immigrating to America was to find employment; there was no work in Norway. When you did work for someone, you got paid with room and board; there was no cash flow. Kole thought of going to work in the mines at Spitzbergen, but he wasn't old enough. Then he thought of floating timber, but that was very dangerous. Kole's brother, Ottar, had left for the US in 1922. Kole, after receiving a letter from Ottar, left to join him. He landed at St. John, Canada on April 14, 1923.</p>
228, side 2	<p>478:</p> <p>Kole went directly to his aunt and uncle, Klara Ulleland and Abraham Skaflestad in Kent. Klara was born in Kent. He lived in a hotel, and went right to work on May 1, 1923.</p>
228, side 2	<p>520: EMIGRATION</p> <p>The trip over. Leaving Norway in the spring of 1923, Kole sailed from Naustdal to Floroe to Bergen. From Bergen he sailed to England on the "Leda" (?). He took a train through England to another ship, which sailed to St. John. From there he took a train to Vancouver, BC, and a boat to Seattle - Tacoma. Kole traveled with his cousin and 11 others from the Naustdal area. One man who had been at sea knew some English out of the bunch of them. They had bought tickets straight through to Tacoma. He has a copy of Luke (New Testament) given to him by the Norwegian Consulate representative who met them in</p>

Container(s)	Description
	Canada. Kole said that you had to have about \$150 to enter the country. All had their medical exams in Norway so they were not held up in Canada for that.
228, side 2	<p>586: SETTLING IN</p> <p>Kole had a job waiting for him in America. His uncle was a lumber engineer for the Gibson-? logging company in Elma. Kole split wood and loaded carts. He lived in the camp and that's how he learned English. There weren't too many Scandinavians at Kole's camp. Kole's aunt and uncle were going to have a baby so they decided to leave the camp, but Kole remained and worked. Ottar worked at another camp in Aberdeen.</p>
228, side 2	<p>630:</p> <p>Kole was paid \$4 a day and then he had to pay for room and board. By the end of the month he had about \$70 after paying all his bills. He worked there for about one and a half months after his aunt and uncle left. The he moved to Seattle where he had found a construction job. He stayed in a hotel and worked six months at ripping down cement forms for walls. He was homesick and lonesome.</p>
228, side 2	<p>662:</p> <p>Kole went back to the woods and worked for three months, finishing with the job around Christmas. He made \$10 a day, doubling his first pay. Kole really wanted to go home to Norway for Christmas.</p>
228, side 2	<p>684:</p> <p>When Kole left Norway he was sure that he would be back. He felt brave to leave, but when he sat down to his last meal at home, he got all choked up. Kole went back 15 years later, and saw his parents again. He also made return trips in 1937, 1946, and 13-14 more times.</p>
228, side 2	<p>700: OCCUPATION</p> <p>He first got the idea to start his own business during the Depression. He liked to drive and his friends told him he should get a cab. At the time he wasn't old enough to get a license; he was 21 and needed to be 22. Eventually Kole got his license and a cab and opened business in the Tacoma area. By the next Christmas, he had acquired a second cab. In the beginning Kole did all the driving himself; then he had to hire an extra driver. They made their headquarters at a restaurant at 13th and Pacific Avenue; the restaurant is now called the Flora. Kole organized his business in 1927, but actually started driving in 1926; went all over the place for one dollar. He has been in business for over 50 years. Since 1970, business has been very different - not very healthy. Cars cost \$800 in the 1920s and \$2100 in the 1970s: the overhead is very expensive now. When the business was at its peak, they had 84 employees.</p>
228, side 1	011: LEARNING ENGLISH

Container(s)	Description
	Kole learned English (well enough to start a cab company) from his little cousins, Klara and her friends, and by just living in America for five years. He had chores to do at his aunt and uncle's when he lived with them at the logging camp. He milked the cows in the morning, ate breakfast, and then went to work. There was a Norwegian church (Zion Lutheran) with a Norwegian pastor at the logging camp. By the 1930s, the service had changed completely from Norwegian to English.
228, side 1	130: DIFFICULTIES The most challenging thing in America for Kole was to stay out of trouble. There were more temptations here: "open houses", bootlegging, etc. Kole made his home in Tacoma in the downtown area, renting first, then purchasing a home.
228, side 1	188: CITIZENSHIP Kole became a citizen in 1943. He applied early on, but had to wait for five years. He has never felt that any form of prejudice has been inflicted upon him for being Norwegian.
228, side 1	215: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY Kole's wife was half Swedish-Finn and half Norwegian. Her parents lived in Aberdeen and that is where he met her. He got a lot of fares out to Aberdeen, and Violet worked at a restaurant there. They were married in 1931 in a church at Aberdeen. Their daughter was born in 1932, and his best memories are of having a healthy daughter. Her name is Marlene Dawson, and she lives in Tacoma.
228, side 1	288: COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES Kole was involved in quite a few community activities: Sons of Norway, Scottish Rite, and Shrine. The Sons of Norway has been his primary source of connection with the Scandinavian community. He joined in 1924. Discusses cousin and friends who emigrated from Norway with him and what they have done.
228, side 1	340: REGRETS The cab business has been a lot of work - took a lot of time.
228, side 1	355: NORWEGIAN CUSTOMS Kole and his family used Norwegian everyday speaking it at home. Their daughter speaks some and understands everything. They have kept up the Norwegian customs to some extent. They have the traditional costumes and attend the festivals in Poulsbo, etc. Kole's opinion of typical Norwegian: he keeps with people of the same heritage, just like others do.
228, side 1	413: OTHER CAREERS

Container(s)	Description
	In 1931, Kole started an ambulance business. In 1940 he bought a taxi franchise at the airport between Seattle and Tacoma.
228, side 1	442: For relaxation he enjoys fishing in Alaska and traveling to Norway. His brother Alf is in Alaska. Ottar passed away in 1975; he worked in lumber camps all his life.
228, side 1	465: Kole speaks in Norwegian - Sunnfjord dialect.
228, side 2	480: More spoken Norwegian.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas
 Confirmation
 Education--Norway
 Emigration and immigration
 Family--Norway
 Naturalization
 Norwegian language
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs

Personal Names :

Herstad, Karlina Knutsonsdatter
 Johnson, Violet
 Oliver, Kole--Interviews
 (creator)
 Skaflestad, Abraham
 Skaflestad, Alf
 Skaflestad, Aslaug
 Skaflestad, Audun
 Skaflestad, Gunnhild
 Skaflestad, Maalfrid
 Ulleland, Klara
 Dawson, Marlene
 Skaflestad, Andreas
 Skaflestad, Helga
 Skaflestad, Kolbjørn
 Skaflestad, Ottar

Corporate Names :

Ancient Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America--Nile temple (Seattle, Wash.)
 Leda (Sloop)

Scottish Rite (Masonic order)

Sons of Norway (U.S.) Norden Lodge No. 2 (Tacoma, Wash.)

Zion Lutheran Church (Tacoma, Wash.)

Family Names :

Herstad family

Oliver family

Skaflestad family

Geographical Names :

Kent (Wash.)

Naustdal (Norway)

Tacoma (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Carpenters

Farmers

Loggers

Taxicab drivers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004