

Nels Simonseth Oral History Interview, 1981

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Simonseth, Nels
Title	Nels Simonseth Oral History Interview
Dates	1981 (inclusive) 1981 1981
Quantity	3 file folders 3 photographs 1 sound cassette
Collection Number	t111
Summary	An oral history interview with Nels Simonseth, 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

Nels Simonseth was born on May 13, 1901 in Rindal, Norway, which is ten Norwegian miles southwest of Trondheim. His parents were Endre Simonseth and Marit Drugli, and there were eleven children in the family. Endre was dairy farmer, and the family lived on a large farm. Nels attended school for seven years, and after he was confirmed, he did carpentry work. Nels met his wife, Gertrude Sinnes, when she was working for his relatives, and they decided to immigrate to America in September of 1922. From New York, Nels and Gertrude took the train to Dawson, MN, where Gertrude's friend's boyfriend had a farm. They began to work on farms in Dawson and were married in Madison, MN. Nels later got a job with the railroad, and they moved to Watson, MN and later Montana. After a few years, Nels and Gertrude moved to the West Coast, where Gertrude had relatives in Conway, WA. They had two daughters at this time, Marie and Esther. They settled in Washington, and Nels obtained a logging job. He worked in logging camps until World War II broke out and then began doing carpentry work again. In 1941, he began building naval bases in Oak Harbor and later joined the union. He continued to do carpentry work for another thirty-seven years. He and Gertrude also had five more children while living in Washington: Edmund, Norman, Grace, John, and Agnes. Nels attends Free Born Lutheran

and belongs to the Sons of Norway. He has returned to Norway twice and says that the country has changed so much, he no longer recognizes it.

Lineage

Full Name: Nels Simonseth. Father: Endre Simonseth. Mother: Marit Drugli. Paternal Grandfather: Tore Halgumseth. Paternal Grandmother: Mali Simonseth. Maternal Grandfather: John Fredrekli. Maternal Grandmother: Olaug Drugli. Brothers and Sisters: Malie Simonseth, Olina Simonseth, Tore Simonseth, John Simonseth, Ingeborg Simonseth, Karen Simonseth (died as a child), Nils Simonseth, Einar Simonseth, Marie Simonseth, Eline Simonseth, Karen Simonseth, Magnar Simonseth. Spouse: Gertrude Sinnes Simonseth. Children: Marie Simonseth, Esther Simonseth, Edmund Simonseth, Norman Simonseth, Grace Simonseth, John Simonseth, Agnes Simonseth.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Nels Simonseth on October 30, 1981 in Stanwood, Washington. It provides information on family background, emigration, marriage and family, employment, and community activities. The interview also contains a photograph of Nels and a friend felling a cedar tree with a 13ft. diameter and two photographs of Nels at the time of the interview. Also see Gertrude Simonseth and Nels and Gertrude's personal tape. 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

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	
111, side 1	004: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Born in Rindal, Norway in 1901 on May 13th. Rindal is 10 Norwegian miles southwest of Trondheim.
111, side 1	012: PARENTS Endre Simonseth and Marit Drugli. The names are place names. His mother was from the neighboring county.
111, side 1	020: FATHER Was a farmer on a big farm, mostly cattle, dairy farming and timber. Raised crops for the cattle. Sold milk, cream and butter.
111, side 1	032: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Eleven in the family. Everyone stayed at home until they were old enough to go out on their own.
111, side 1	040: Tore took over the farm when his parents died. Tore's daughter's husband then took over the farm.
111, side 1	050:

Container(s)	Description
	Malie married a guy who owned a grocery store. Olina died when she was 20 or 21. Ingeborg. Karen died when 11 or 12.
111, side 1	056: Eline and Marie are his twin sisters, who are both nurses. Karen married a fellow in the butcher business.
111, side 1	065: Einar and John came to Vancouver, Canada. John was a logger. Einar operated gas and steam shovels. Magnar does carpentry and painting in Rindal, Norway.
111, side 1	081: GRANDPARENTS Paternal grandparents were Mali Simonseth and Tore Halgumseth. The farm was given to his mother because there were no brothers and she was the oldest girl. The name Simonseth came down from the 1600 & 1700s. Simonseth means "Simon set on the place." Name goes way back.
111, side 1	107: MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS Olaug Drugli and John Fredreki. Olaug was the owner of a farm. John married her and operated the farm. Had a little bit of everything on the farm.
111, side 1	120: CHILDHOOD HOME It was a big place with a red barn. It was a big living house with 8-10 bedrooms with a big front room, living and dining room. The home also had big kitchens. There was an extra room for grandparents.
111, side 1	132: SCHOOL Seven years.
111, side 1	132: CONFIRMED Yes.
111, side 1	138: CHURCH Two in the valley. Big main church and a little church named "kapell" where the minister came every other Sunday. Nels went to the little church because it was closer. Confirmed in the big church, in cars to ride in.
111, side 1	152: ENTERTAINMENT Considered an adult when confirmed, went to dances, and small parties. Walked around in the woods. Skied to school, which was the means of transportation in the winter.
111, side 1	169: TRANSPORTATION Had horses. Had a sled for the horse to pull and buggies and wagons.

Container(s)	Description
111, side 1	180: CHRISTMAS EVE Put on best clothes. Took a bath. Lutefisk and lefse for dinner. Everyone stayed home.
111, side 1	187: CHRISTMAS DAY Went to church. Second day of Christmas was a holiday. Young people gathered around for parties and dances. Celebrated between Christmas and New Year's. Not much work went on.
111, side 1	201: PRESENTS Not many. Had a Christmas party for the kids at the schoolhouse. Teacher handed out one apple per student for a present. "Can still smell the apple." They were special shipped from Spain and other countries.
111, side 1	212: CHRISTMAS TREE Had one at home. Homemade decorations. Baked goods hanging from the tree.
111, side 1	220: Put out food for little birds. Saved a bundle of barley for them at Christmas.
111, side 1	231: JULEBAKK Ate rice soup. He was big and would reach over to the table from the door and eat it.
111, side 1	248: WORK Nels worked at home for a long time because he was needed. Did carpentry work, building houses. Helped build his brother's house on the land near the home place.
111, side 1	265: TALK OF AMERICA At age 22, he started talking about coming to America. He always wanted to go. His uncles had been there. Heard one could pick up gold in the streets in America.
111, side 1	277: Came to America with his wife, Gertrude. She was from the same district. He met her when she was working for his relatives. They decided to go to America.
111, side 1	295: Their parents were still living when they left Norway.
111, side 1	305:

Container(s)	Description
	Left Norway in September of 1921 or '22. Left from Oslo on the Stavangerfjord. Took the train from Trondheim to Oslo. Spent the night in Oslo and then caught the boat.
111, side 1	324: DEPARTURE A brass band was playing when they left. Lots of good-byes. People were seeing each other for the last time.
111, side 1	334: BOAT TRIP Traveled along the coast of Norway to Stavanger and Bergen to pick up people. Went across the Atlantic north of Scotland. Weather was nice.
111, side 1	341: BOAT TRIP Always something going on, church, dancing, and good food.
111, side 1	348: ARRIVAL Landed in New York. Took 3-4 days at Ellis Island because a French boat was ahead of them.
111, side 1	364: LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES Couldn't speak any English. Used sign language and got along fine on the train. He describes an incident in Chicago where someone helped them buy some food in a restaurant. Could buy food on the train.
111, side 1	398: Describes a Swedish friend who bought some shaving soap in Chicago and met a Norwegian barber. Was surprised.
111, side 1	421: Didn't try speaking the language.
111, side 1	433: TRAIN TRAVEL Took the train from Chicago to Dawson, Minnesota. Gertrude's friend's boyfriend has a farm in Dawson. Gertrude's friend planned to come with Gertrude and Nels to Minnesota but her plans changed. She came next spring and they were married.
111, side 1	451: His name was John Egen and her name was Anna Viken. They did farming in Dawson which is SW of Minneapolis. Stayed in Minnesota for four years.
111, side 1	462: WORK Nels worked on a farm and got a job on the railroad. Got a job with a contractor in Montana building grain elevators in new towns along the railroad tracks. Boss's name was Ed Webster from Winthrop, Minnesota.

Container(s)	Description
111, side 1	484: Gertrude worked as a hire hand in the fields.
111, side 1	492: Moved to Watson, Minnesota when Nels began working on the railroad.
111, side 1	496: MOVED WEST Moved because Gertrude had relatives in Conway, Washington. Had heard it always rains on the west coast.
111, side 1	505: MARRIED January 29, 1923 in Madison, Minnesota at the county seat.
111, side 1	531: MOVING WEST Gertrude had taken the train to Scobey, Montana. Nels bought a Model-T Ford. Gertrude went to Redstone, Montana for a few days. He had two children now, Marie and Esther.
111, side 1	560: WEATHER Problems with the snow. Couldn't see through the windshield. No wipers. Describes the route to the west coast. Were traveling in October by train.
111, side 1	602: IDAHO Looked good, timber and hills. Looked more like Norway. Came to Everett, Washington. Took a train to Mt. Vernon. Took a bus to Gertrude's relatives.
111, side 1	614: WORK Nels started working in the woods. Just went and asked for the job. Spent 15 years falling timber in logging camps at Snoqualmie Falls, Oregon, and Peninsula, Washington. Lived at the camps.
111, side 1	636: LOGGING CAMPS Good camps. It was clean and had good food. They changed the beds every week. Bed maker made beds every day.
111, side 1	649: LOGGING CAMPS Working conditions were good. Starting pay or scale. Head faller was the boss over others.
111, side 1	660: "SWEDISH MYSTERY WHIP" A hand saw, buck saw.
111, side 1	667: LOGGING

Container(s)	Description
	Nels was second and head faller. Head faller made \$3.75 a day. Second faller made \$3.50 a day. \$3.50 a day as a buckner. Most you could make in a month was \$70. Room and board was cheap.
111, side 2	007: DEPRESSION In 1929, the logging camps closed down. Stock market crashed. A few camps stayed open. Got better with Roosevelt. Worked in logging camps until WWII.
111, side 2	022: CARPENTRY WORK Started in 1941 building naval bases in Oak Harbor, Washington. Joined the union in Mt. Vernon, Washington. Paid \$50. Went to work in Oak Harbor. Learned carpentry in the "Old Country." Had done carpentry for 36 years.
111, side 2	032: LOGGING CAMPS Many Scandinavians, Swedes and Finlanders. Contracting work was a mixture of people. English was usually spoken.
111, side 2	040: MONTANA Mostly Swedes there. Nels was the only Norwegian. They told stories about Norwegians.
111, side 2	048: MINNESOTA Everyone spoke Norwegian. The doctor was Irish in the town but he could speak fluent Norwegian.
111, side 2	064: LEARNING ENGLISH While working on the railroad, didn't practice English because people made fun of you. Boss spoke English. Fellow workers helped him learn English.
111, side 2	086: ALASKA Did carpentry work on the air bases in Fairbanks.
111, side 2	093: WORK Worked around Mt. Vernon, Washington and built houses on the island. Now he makes grandfather clocks and cedar chests. He is retired. Sells some of the things he makes.
111, side 2	113: CHILDREN Marie married Roy Anderson who is a school bus driver. They have three children. Esther married to a fellow who sells hospital supplies and lives in Toledo, Ohio. Karen married to a butcher (this is his sister, Karen). Edmund drives a timber truck for a company in Everett.
111, side 2	136:

Container(s)	Description
	Norman worked for Carnation. Now has a business with his brother in Seattle. Grace married to a Wilson who drives trucks, sells potato chips and mayonnaise to grocery stores.
111, side 2	145: John has a business in Seattle, Washington. Agnes married to a fellow who drives a milk truck in Conway, Washington.
111, side 2	152: CHURCH Belongs to Free Born Lutheran.
111, side 2	157: SONS OF NORWAY Belongs. Talking to people. Had friends there.
111, side 2	165: TRIPS TO NORWAY Twice. He didn't recognize the country. "Recognized the hills." Trondhiem was different.
111, side 2	176: CHANGES Use tractors and machinery. Not horses like in the olden days. People are different.
111, side 2	190: PEOPLE People in town have changed. Police and railway agents are more polite and friendly than years ago.
111, side 2	203: CHANGES IN AMERICA Everybody used to know each other. Neighborhood support. Today you don't even know your neighbor.
111, side 2	215: People don't visit each other as much. Neighbors don't know each other, same in Norway and the U.S. A big difference in people.
111, side 2	235: Still corresponds with people in Norway.
111, side 2	243: CHILDREN Can't speak Norwegian. Speaks Norwegian. English at home.
111, side 2	252: SPOKEN NORWEGIAN Nels speaks a few words.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas
Depressions--1929
Emigration and immigration
Family--Norway
Norway--Social conditions--1945-
Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs
Ocean travel
Railroad travel

Personal Names :

Simonseth, Nels--Interviews
(creator)
Halgumseth, Tore
Simonseth, Agnes
Simonseth, Edmund
Simonseth, Esther
Simonseth, Gertrude
Simonseth, Grace
Simonseth, John
Simonseth, Mali
Simonseth, Marie
Simonseth, Norman
Drugli, Marit
Drugli, Olaus
Fredrekli, John
Simonseth, Endre

Corporate Names :

Ellis Island (N.J. and N.Y.)
Free Born Lutheran Church (Stanwood, Wash.)
Sons of Norway (U.S.) Fritjov Lodge No.17 (Stanwood, Wash.)
Stavangerfjord (Steamship)

Family Names :

Drugli family
Fredrekli family
Halgumseth family
Simonseth family
Sinnes family

Geographical Names :

Conway (Wash.)
Dawson (Minn.)
Montana
Rindal (Norway)
Watson (Minn.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Carpenters
Farmers
Loggers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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