

# Bertel Pedersen Gilje Oral History Interview, 1982

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Gilje, Bertel Pedersen
<b>Title</b>	Bertel Pedersen Gilje Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
<b>Quantity</b>	2 file folders 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t181
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Bertel Pedersen Gilje, 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

Bertel Gilje was born on November 10, 1903 in Stavanger, Norway to Andreas Pedersen Norbotn and Karen Talette Gilje. Bertel's four sisters, Anna, Talette, Marie, Andrea, all took the family name of Pedersen, his brother Peder took their paternal grandfather's name of Norbotn, and Bertel, who was the youngest boy in the family, took his mother's family name. Bertel's father was a longshoreman, and the family had a three-story house, in which they rented out the first floor. The Church was near their home, and Pastor Johannes Lunde confirmed Bertel there.

Bertel attended Stavanger public school for eight years, during which time he learned how to play the trumpet and participated in the school band. Rather than continuing on to a middle school like his brother and sister, Bertel went into a bookbinding apprenticeship after his eight years of public school. For four years, he went to technical evening school and was employed by a second generation German, who took Bertel and the other apprentices on trips to Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. Bertel's apprenticeship concluded in 1924, after which Bertel went to a trade school in Copenhagen for three months. In an effort to make a descent living, Bertel decided to immigrate to America in April

1927. After working in New York for a couple of months, he went to Minnesota, where he had an uncle. Bertel's uncle arranged a job for him with Augsburg's Publishing House, and Bertel joined the Bookbinder's Union. After three years, he returned to Norway, but later came back to America and found more bookbinding jobs.

On his second trip to Norway, Bertel met his future wife, Julie, who was from Mandal, Norway. Julie was returning to Norway on the "Stavangerfjord" and Bertel on the "Bergensfjord," but after the "Stavangerfjord" lost its propeller in the middle of the Atlantic, it had to return to New York, and Bertel ended up on the "Bergensfjord" with Julie. They were married in July 1936 in Norway and then moved to Brooklyn, New York, where their children, Oddrun and Karhild, were born. Not wanting his children to grow up in Brooklyn, Bertel and his family returned to Oslo, Norway in 1939. Upon this return to Norway, Bertel received his master bookbinder certificate and got a job managing a bindery.

When World War II began, Bertel attempted to leave Norway again but could not. Due to German inspections and keeping up with what the Norwegian publishers wanted, work was difficult for Bertel during the war, and when the war ended, Bertel and his family returned to the United States. At this time, Bertel and Julie now had another child, Bjornulf. Bertel worked in Birmingham, Alabama and Spokane, WA before permanently settling in Tacoma, WA, where he worked for Pioneer Printing Company and the Washington State Printing Plant. In Tacoma, Bertel also joined the Normanna Male Chorus, the Sons of Norway, and Nordmann Forbundet, an organization for Norwegians living outside of Norway. He and Julie have visited Norway in 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, and 1981, and after he retired, they began speaking mostly Norwegian in their home. According to Bertel, "Har du noe aa si, saa snakk norsk," which means "if you have something to say, then say it in Norwegian."

#### Lineage

Full Name: Bertel Pedersen Gilje. Father: Andreas Pedersen Norbotn. Mother: Karen Talette Gilje. Paternal Grandfather: Per Norbotn. Paternal Grandmother: Anna Gabrielsdatter Soerbotn. Maternal Grandfather: Bertel Akselsen Gilje. Maternal Grandmother: Karen Talette Gilje. Brothers and Sisters: Anna Pauline Pedersen, Talette Bergitte Pedersen, Inger Marie Pedersen, Peder Pedersen Norbotn, Karoline Andrea Pedersen, Johanne Pedersen. Spouse: Julie Gilje. Children: Karhild Olene Stackpole, Oddrun Andora Borchers, Bjornulf Andreas Gilje.

## Content Description

This interview was conducted with Bertel Gilje on July 21, 1982 in Tacoma, Washington. It contains information about family background, education, occupation, emigration, community activities, and Norwegian heritage. Also available is a letter from Bertel to Dr. Janet Rasmussen in regards to PLU's "Scandinavian Immigrant Experience." 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 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, WashingtonUniversity of Washington Press1993

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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	
181, side 1	024: Bertel Pedersen Gilje. Pedersen was his father's family name. Bertel was baptized after his maternal grandfather who came from the town of Gilje, 60 kilometers from Stavanger. Bertel's father took his family name, Pedersen

Container(s)	Description
	and his place of birth, Norbotn. Bertel was born on November 10, 1903 in Stavanger, Norway.
181, side 1	096: PARENTS Andreas Pedersen and Karen Gilje. The Gilje name followed Bertel because he was the youngest boy in the family. Father used to be a cook on a sailing ship. Sailed to Spain, Italy, and the Mediterranean. He stopped sailing after he got married. He worked as a longshoreman in Stavanger during WWI.
181, side 1	165: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Five sisters and two brother, Anna, Talette, Marie, Andrea all of the sisters took the family name Pedersen. Brother, Peder Pedersen Norbotn took the paternal grandfather's name.
181, side 1	274: GRANDPARENTS Paternal grandfather was a schoolteacher from Sundfjord north (?) of Bergen. He drowned when fishing for kveite (halibut). Bertel never met him. His grandfather's name was Norbotn. He had several sisters in the U.S. Maternal grandfather was a farmer. Died when 60 years old. Grandmother lived to be 93 years old. Many in the Gilje family lived to be quite old.
181, side 1	360: CHILDHOOD Grew up in Stavanger. Sankt Johannes Park and Church were near his home. Bertel was confirmed at this church. Went to Johannes Skole. The pastor at the church was Johannes Lunde (?) who was bishop in Oslo after he'd been in Stavanger for 10 or 15 years.
181, side 1	395: STAVANGER A growing city. Bertel's father built his home two blocks from the city line. Many of the Giljes bought farmland around Stavanger.
181, side 1	437: FATHER'S WORK Mostly long shoring. Knew how to prepare herring, salted it and put it in big barrels. He often helped pack fish.
181, side 1	456: CHILDHOOD HOME : Three-story home. Bertel's father would rent out the basement or the first floor. They lived on the second floor for many years. They eventually moved to the third floor because Bertel's father wanted to be able to see the fjord and ships coming in. (See also I-782)
181, side 1	456: CHILDHOOD (See also I-360) Learned to play trumpet in the school band. The first school band festival was in 1918. Bertel was 10 years old when he started in 1913. They had this festival every other year. Played in Oslo and Baerum. 2000 boys

Container(s)	Description
	from all over Norway played. His first trip out of Stavanger was when his band took the boat to Oslo to play in the festival. They played for the king.
181, side 1	574: WORK Bertel, his wife, and two of their children moved from the U.S. to Norway to take a position as a bookbinder in Oslo. For half a year, they lived up by Holmenkollen Ski Jump in Oslo. Then they got a house in Baerum.
181, side 1	602: CHILDHOOD (See also I-360 and I-456) Bertel attended the public school in Stavanger for eight years. His brother and sister went to middle school but Bertel went into a bookbinding apprenticeship. His family had friends in the printing trade. He spent four years going to a technical evening school. His employer was second generation German. He gave all his apprentices a trip out in the world. Mostly to Denmark, Germany, and Sweden. When Bertel's apprenticeship was over in 1924, he was sent to a trade school in Copenhagen for three months. Business was slow for the German in 1926 so some of the single men were laid off. Bertel was out of work except for the money he had made from playing in the band.
181, side 1	681: REASONS FOR COMING TO AMERICA Had to pay city tax even if you weren't working. The city band was paid 800 Nkr for playing in the city park during the summer. Bertel had to pay 800 Nkr in taxes that year. Bertel couldn't make a living as a musician so he quit. He decided to go to America. Relatives living in the U.S. came to Norway to visit. Bertel went to the U.S. with them in April 1927.
181, side 1	735: TRIP TO AMERICA The ship went from Oslo to Stavanger. It took thirteen days to get to Brooklyn, New York. The ship was like a big hotel. They listened to the band play every day. Ate three meals a day.
181, side 1	766: NEW YORK Got a job in Minneola through a relative. Worked there for a couple of months. Hadn't planned on staying in New York. Had an uncle in Minnesota. Earned money to go to Minnesota.
181, side 1	782: FEELINGS ABOUT LEAVING NORWAY Came on the Stavangerfjord. Was happy to leave. His father had a big family to take care of. Bertel didn't want to be a bother to his family. He lived with his parents until he left for America. The house had room for 6 or 7 children. Bertel had his room up in the attic. From his window, he could see over the city, the harbor, and the fjord. Beautiful scenery. Could see mountains too.
181, side 1	823: FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE U.S. Streets and location were beautiful. They weren't far from the Norwegian Seaman's Church in Brooklyn, New York. Had to travel over an hour to get

Container(s)	Description
	to work. There were many Norwegians around. He had studied one year of English while in Norway as well.
181, side 1	<p>859: WORK</p> <p>Bookbinding (See also I-574) Intended to find work in the printing trade. His uncle in Minnesota arranged a job for him with Augsburg's Publishing House in Minneapolis. Bertel worked on his uncle's farm for only six weeks before he got the job in Augsburg's, He joined the Bookbinder's Union. Bertel has a certificate from Norway, which certifies that he is a bookbinder.</p>
181, side 1	<p>918: WORKING IN NORWAY</p> <p>(See also I-574) Went back to Norway to work as a bookbinder three years after he'd started working as a bookbinder in the U.S. He went back to Norway in 1939 and became a master bookbinder. He explains the certificate he received which qualifies him as a master bookbinder.</p>
181, side 1	<p>974: MINNESOTA</p> <p>Lived by himself. There were many Norwegians in Minneapolis. People in Norway were out of work after WWI so they came to the U.S. He was lucky to come to the U.S. with relatives and to have relatives to help him.</p>
181, side 1	<p>995: BOOKBINDING TRADE</p> <p>Bound mostly library books, special bindings. Sew, glue, make covers, and printed titles, and authors on the books. It took two and a half hours to bind one book. He learned the trade in Norway (See also I-602). Folkeboksamlingens bøker (Norway's variety of libraries) ordered books from the company Bertel worked for in Oslo. They could make 100 books at a time and put them in storage until the libraries sent in their orders.</p>
181, side 1	<p>1039: DIFFICULTIES IN AMERICA</p> <p>(See also I-823) The English language was a problem in the beginning, but there were so many Scandinavians in Minnesota that it was difficult to get along. Got bookbinding job with R.R. Donnelley Printing Company. Got a job through the union working for economy advertising company in Iowa City, which is a university town. Worked there for three months on school annuals at the university. Got away from Norwegians and met many students. Most of the students were Americans. Helped his English.</p>
181, side 1	<p>1094: COMPARISON OF PAY IN NORWAY AND THE U.S.</p> <p>Pay was much better in the U.S. He had borrowed money to come to the U.S. from his sister in Norway. After working in a lumberyard for one month, he was able to pay back his sister. He had a good salary in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The union had him working as long as there was work to do.</p>
181, side 2	005: WORK

Container(s)	Description
	<p>The union let him go. He went back to Iowa City in April and worked for three months on the university's yearbooks. (See also I-1039). Got his next job as a bookbinder in Des Moines, Iowa.</p>
181, side 2	<p>074: MEETING SPOUSE  Met on Bertel's second trip back to Norway. He was on the Bergensfjord and she was on the Stavangerfjord. Stavangerfjord lost its propeller in the middle of the Atlantic. Had to go back to New York. Bertel and his wife-to-be ended up on the same boat. They were married in July 1936 in Norway. Before marrying they would go to a Norwegian Youth Organization in Brooklyn, New York together.</p>
181, side 2	<p>200: CHILDREN  Oddrun and Karhild were both born in Brooklyn, NY.</p>
181, side 2	<p>210: WORK IN NORWAY  Bertel didn't want his children to grow up in New York. He applied for a job as a bookbinder in Oslo, Norway. Bertel was still a Norwegian citizen. His job was to take care of the bindery, which had 64 bookbinders, employed. This company had what was called a "Salmeboks forlaget." They published books for the church. They also published for the libraries of Norway, "Folkeboksamlingens Ekspedisjon." The bindery would bind 200 or 300 copies of a book and when the libraries wanted it they could just write to this department. (See also I-574).</p>
181, side 2	<p>272: WWII  They came to Norway in June, 1939. In April 1940 the Germans occupied Norway. Bertel tried to get out of Norway but no boats were leaving Norway at that time. Bertel had a good, steady job, but it was tough. The Germans came in everyday to inspect what they were doing and what they should do for them. They found out that Bertel had a lot of genuine leather. They paid Bertel for what they took and Bertel raised his prices. They also got Bertel other materials he needed. They would give all bookbinder supervisors in the city of Oslo supplies such as thread, glue, cardboard, and cloth. They had a hard time keeping up with what the Norwegian publishers wanted. Bertel could supply publishers with 200-500 copies but he could not fill orders for 10,000 copies. He couldn't use quality materials for 10,000 copies. Bertel stayed in Norway until the war was over. He wrote to Book Production Magazine in New York. He put an ad in this magazine. Two print shops wrote to him, offering him jobs after the war was over. Bertel didn't want to stay in Norway after the war. His experience there had been disappointing.</p>
181, side 2	<p>436: WORK IN THE U.S.  Got a job with the Military Service Company. Bertel was supposed to take care of subscriptions for different magazines ordered from different military services in the United States. He was supposed to make binders. Bertel had to move to Birmingham, Alabama from Norway. Alabama was too hot for him. He started a bookbindery for them. Bertel worked there for four years.</p>

Container(s)	Description
181, side 2	<p>510: MOVING TO WASHINGTON STATE</p> <p>Bertel didn't like it Alabama. The people he worked with were not cooperative. He read an ad in a newspaper. A man in Spokane, Washington was selling his bindery. His name was Arneson, a Scandinavian name. Bertel wrote to him. He wanted to buy the bindery in Spokane. He made a deal with Arneson that he should stay and help out for three months until Bertel got organized. Bertel took it over in September 1954. Bertel had a car but no driver's license. He found a truck driver in Birmingham who would take them to Spokane with a truckload of furniture and belongings. Three days after they came to Spokane, Bertel had to organize the bindery. Arneson got sick and died three days later. One of Arneson's sons was a bookbinder in South Dakota. He didn't want to take over his father's business. The other son was a union representative in Los Angeles, California. Bertel was in Spokane for eight months and did fairly good business, but the bindery wasn't in very good condition.</p>
181, side 2	<p>623: MOVING TO TACOMA</p> <p>Bertel was asked by Pioneer Printing Company of Tacoma to take the position of foreman in the bookbindery. He didn't want to stay in Spokane so he left. He liked his job in Tacoma. Later the Washington State Printing Plant needed a man and Bertel wanted to work for the. This was a civil service job. His wife found their house for them.</p>
181, side 2	<p>666: CITIZENSHIP</p> <p>(See also I-210) 1951 when he was in Birmingham, Alabama.</p>
181, side 2	<p>680: NORWEGIAN ORGANIZATIONS</p> <p>Sang in the Normanna Male Chorus in Tacoma from 1955-1981. Sons of Norway. Nordmanns Forbundet, an organization for Norwegians living outside of Norway; headquarters are in Oslo.</p>
181, side 2	<p>741: TRIPS TO NORWAY</p> <p>April 1981, stayed four to five months. They brought one of their grandchildren with them. They went in 1975 also. They stayed about three months. They visited his family in Stavanger and his wife's family. Traveled around Sørlandet. Their granddaughter, who was almost 18 then went with them in 1981. She had her driver's license so she could drive all over Norway. They stopped in Gothenburg (Göteborg), Sweden and got a car. The granddaughter drove 7,000 miles in Norway. They drove around southern Norway first. Bertel's wife Julie is from the Kristiansand area. They also drove through Telemark to Haugesund. Drove to Karmoey and took a ferry to Stavanger.</p>
181, side 2	<p>859: NORWEGIAN TRADITIONS AND CULTURE</p> <p>The other children and grandchildren don't take as much interest in the traditions and culture as this one granddaughter does. His three children speak Norwegian. Karhild and her family took a trip to Norway in 1969.</p>
181, side 2	<p>904: THE NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE IN THE HOME</p>



Container(s)	Description
	They spoke mostly English while Bertel was working in the print shops. They speak mostly Norwegian know that he's retired.
181, side 2	915: EXAMPLE OF NORWEGIAN "Har du noe å si, så snakk norsk!" (if you have something to say, then say it in Norwegian!)
181, side 2	932: FEELINGS ABOUT NORWAY AND THE U.S. Bertel feels he belongs to the U.S. just as much he belongs to Norway. When he is in Stavanger, he remembers playing in the city band during his childhood. They played at several dedications of various statutes and monuments in Stavanger. He tells about the dedication of a monument in Stavanger in July 1925. This monument was for those who had emigrated from Norway between 1825 and 1925. Many of the older people in Stavanger remember Bertel. He and his wife went to Norway in 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, and 1979. His wife had a stroke in 1980 so they didn't go. They went again in 1981. Bertel would have gone in 1982 but Norway cut off his social security in March 1982. Bertel and his daughter have sent a protest because they've been property taxes, electricity, and water for the cabin they inherited from Bertel's oldest sister.
181, side 2	1086: NORMANNA MALE CHORUS (See also II-680) Quit singing in 1981. His voice isn't good anymore. Bertel misses not singing in the choir.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Education--Norway  
 Education--Norway  
 Emigration and immigration  
 Family--Norway  
 Marriage service  
 Norway -- Economic aspects -- 1945 -  
 Norway - History - German Occupation, 1940-1945  
 Norwegian language  
 Norwegian-Americans -- Ethnic identity  
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs  
 Ocean travel  
 Return migration -- Norway  
 Return migration -- United States  
 World War, 1939-1945

### Personal Names :

Gilje, Bertel Pedersen--Interviews  
 (creator)  
 Borchers, Oddrun

Gilje, Bjornulf  
Norbotn, Per  
Stackpole, Karhild  
Gijle, Bertel Akelsen  
Gilje, Julie  
Gilje, Karen Talette  
Norbotn, Andreas Pedersen  
Soerbotn, Anna Gabrielsdatter

**Corporate Names :**

Augsburg Publishing House  
Bergensfjord (Steamship)  
Normanna Male Chorus (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Pioneer Printing Company (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Salmeboksførlaget (Oslo, Norway)  
Sons of Norway (U.S.) Norden Lodge No. 2 (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Stavangerfjord (Steamship)

**Family Names :**

Gilje family  
Norbotn family  
Pedersen family  
Sørbotn family

**Geographical Names :**

Birmingham (Alabama)  
Brooklyn (New York)  
Copenhagen (Denmark)  
Oslo (Norway)  
Spokane (Wash.)  
Stavanger (Norway)  
Tacoma (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Bookbinders  
Musicians  
Stevedores  
Trumpet players

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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