

# Esther Wiirre Rinne Oral History Interview, 1981

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Rinne, Esther Wiirre
<b>Title</b>	Esther Wiirre Rinne Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1981 (inclusive) 1981 1981
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 1 photograph 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t081
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Esther Wiirre Rinne, a Finnish 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

Esther Rinne was born on January 7, 1901 in Pyhajoki, Finland to Antti and Sophia Wiirre. Esther had five older siblings, but most of them had immigrated to Eureka, CA in the 1890s. When Esther was two years old, her mother passed away. Her father, who was a carpenter, tried to take care of her but had to board her out to different families for ten years while he worked. When Esther was nineteen, one of her sisters sent her a ticket to America. By the time Esther arrived in California, her sister, Anne, had already arranged a job for her. She began living and working at a cookhouse, where she washed dishes and waited tables. The language differences were a problem at first, but Esther remained at the cookhouse for two years. When she was granted a two-week vacation, Esther went to Astoria, OR to visit her sister, who ended up convincing Esther to stay. Esther found a job at a local restaurant and met her husband, Sulo Rinne, who was originally from Pirkkala, Finland. They had one son, but he died while serving in the military. In Astoria, Esther also joined the Peace Lutheran Church and American Legion Auxiliary. She has returned to Finland twice, but by the second trip, so many things

had changed that she felt no need to return a third time. Esther likes living in America and has no special feelings about being Finnish.

## Lineage

Full Name: Esther Rinne. Maiden Name: Esther Wiirre. Father: Antti Wiirre. Mother: Sophia Wiirre. Brothers and Sisters: Heikki (Hank) Wiirre, Jenny Wiirre, Hilda Wiirre, Anne Wiirre, Helmi Wiirre. Spouse: Sulo Rinne. Children: One son killed in World War II.

## Content Description

This interview was conducted with Esther Rinne on August 25, 1981 Astoria, Oregon. It provides information on family background, emigration, employment, marriage, and community activities. The interview also includes a photograph of Esther. Also see Sulo Rinne.

## 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 Donna Mallonee 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	
81, side 1	018: ESTHER RINNE Maiden name was Wiirre. Born in Pyhajoki, Finland on January 7, 1901. Pyhajoki is near Oulu in Oulun Laani.
81, side 1	074: PARENTS Father - Antti. Mother - Sophia. Mother died when Esther was 2 yrs old. Father was a carpenter. Father tried to take care of her. He had to board her out because he had to work. Some families treated her cruelly. She didn't dare tell her father. He visited her often.
81, side 1	140: This went on for 10 years. Went to school. When 14 years old found a nice family to stay with. Took good care of her.
81, side 1	156: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Had a brother who was 22 years older, a sister 21 years older. They were in America when she was born. Heikki (Hank), Jenny, Hilda, Anne, Helme. Esther was youngest. Only knew Helme. Helme 17 when mother died. Most of them settled in Eureka, California in 1890's.
81, side 1	211: GRANDPARENTS Doesn't remember them.
81, side 1	216: FAMILY NAME Name hasn't changed.
81, side 1	225:

Container(s)	Description
	Stayed with a good family from age 14-17. Their name was Harrilla (?). Lived on a farm. This was still in Pyhajoki.
81, side 1	248: After this, went to stay with a sister in Rauma in the southern part of Finland. When Esther was 19, a sister in America sent her a ticket to come to the US. Came to Eureka, California. Came by herself.
81, side 1	282: TRIP TO AMERICA Came on the Lusitania (?) across the Atlantic. Ellis Island was awful.. Dirty. 5 girls from Finland. This was 1920.
81, side 1	318: Sister wrote from America - don't take any money with you. She wrote that they'd send what she needed to Nilson & Lundbeck Co. in New York. When Esther got to Ellis Island, she found out Ellis Island was Ellis Island and New York was New York. Esther didn't have the \$25 on her so she had to send a telegram to her sister for money. Stayed in a tiny room with some other Finnish girls. Finally got her money. They gave her a sack lunch. Cost \$3.00. Bread and moldy cheese. Escorted to the train. Pinned a note on her said where she was going.
81, side 1	387: TRAIN TRIP Saw a black person for the first time. They wouldn't let her go anywhere when the train stopped. Trip took 9 days.
81, side 1	457: Came to San Francisco, California first. Went to a restroom to wash up. Left suitcase on bench. Two ladies eyed the suitcase. Trapped Esther. Took her on two streetcars and up to the 6th floor of a hotel. Started looking for her purse. One of the ladies went to a phone.
81, side 1	500: Signaled for Esther to come. She heard a Finnish voice. Said the ladies were policewomen; they wanted to know if she had the \$1.50 to pay for a hotel room for the night. They showed her where to go in the morning. Showed her the time on a clock when she should be there. Was ready to go at 5:30. Went to the place they showed her. Found an ocean in front of her instead of a train. The two ladies were there again.
81, side 1	560: Gave her an envelope to give to the conductor. She had to take a ferry across the bay. Goldengate Bridge wasn't built yet. Policeman met her at other end. Escorted her to the train. She gave the letter to the conductor. Took a whole day to get from San Francisco to Eureka, California.
81, side 1	586:

Container(s)	Description
	Sisters were there. Esther told them to ask the conductor what the letter was. The letter said not to let her go anywhere. In those days, many girls disappeared. Her sisters arranged for her to be protected on her journey.
81, side 1	617: FEELINGS ABOUT COMING TO AMERICA Left Finland from Hanko (Hangö). On a beautiful evening. Felt lonesome. Felt better once she got to England and met some other Finnish girls. Got to California and her sister, Anne had a job for her. Esther had only 2 days before she started. Sister told her not to bring many clothes with her. They'd be out of style here. Esther was sorry she hadn't brought more. Styles were the same. Clothes were expensive.
81, side 1	665: WORK Worked in a cookhouse near Eureka, California. First washed dishes. Then waited tables. Owed her sister for the ticket and the \$25. Lived at the cookhouse. Cook was German. One girl was Finnish-Swedish. Mrs. Curry was America. Esther felt at home here. People were nice.
81, side 1	703: PROBLEMS WITH THE LANGUAGE People were very understanding. Always confused cabbage and lettuce. Which ever the cook asked for, she brought the other. Had to learn English. Nobody spoke Finnish there. Every fourth week she'd go to Eureka and visit her sister. She stayed at the cookhouse for 2 years.
81, side 1	728: She got a 2 week vacation. Went to Astoria, Oregon. by boat to visit her sister. Sister talked her into staying in Astoria. Got a job at a restaurant. Waited tables.
81, side 1	766: Met her husband in Astoria. They've lived there for 58 years. They had one boy, but he died in the service. Her husband's name in Sulo.
81, side 1	789: After getting married they bought a farm. Had cattle, chicken. Raised lettuce, peas, etc. Farm was in Gearhart, Oregon. Son grew up there. Was born in a hospital in Seaside, Oregon. Went to high school there.
81, side 1	816: CHURCH Belong to Peace Lutheran Church in Astoria., Services in Finnish once a month.
81, side 1	824: Doesn't belong to any Finnish organizations. Belongs to American Legion Auxiliary.

Container(s)	Description
81, side 1	833: FINNISH COOKING Mommi - a Finnish dish made at Easter. Lutefisk - A Christmas dish. Juhannusjuusto - See also I-878.
81, side 1	878: FINNISH CELEBRATIONS Juhannus (Midsummer). People stay up all the night. Custom to make Juhannusjuusto - a kind of cheese. Made out of milk. Cook it in a pan all night. It cooks down. Yellow and crisp. Christmas - Go to church at 6:00 am. After church, eat breakfast: rice pudding and baked mashed potatoes. Put cardamom in the potatoes. Pannuikku - pancake but different than American. Baked in oven. Serve meat with the meal too.
81, side 1	939: TWO TRIPS BACK TO FINLAND First in 1950. Father was gone. Sister still living. Oldest sisters' dons almost like a brother. Friends in Pyhajoki.
81, side 1	954: Not much different on the first trip. Second trip in 1963 many changes. Roads were different. People she knew were gone. Didn't want to go back after that. Has only a niece and a nephew left in Finland. Still writes to the Harrilla's (?) girl. She's been to the U.S. to visit in 1972. See also I-225.
81, side 1	985: No special feeling about being Finnish. Has a lot of English speaking friends.
81, side 1	1008: Speaks Finnish with her husband and Mrs. Leppinen (?), a neighbor who doesn't speak English.
81, side 1	1031: Esther likes it in America. Astoria has changed a lot. Likes Seaside better. Only 20 minutes to drive there.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Emigration and immigration  
Family--Finland  
Finnish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific-- Interviews  
Finnish-Americans--Social life and customs  
Railroad travel

### Personal Names :

Rinne, Esther--Interviews  
(creator)  
Rinne, Sulo

Wiihre, Anne  
Wiihre, Antti  
Wiihre, Sophia

**Corporate Names :**

Lusitania (Steamship)  
Peace Lutheran Church (Astoria, Or.)

**Family Names :**

Rinne family  
Wiihre family

**Geographical Names :**

Astoria (Or.)  
Eureka (Calif.)  
Pirkkala (Finland)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Cooks  
Farmers  
Waitresses

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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