

# Clara Oleva Josepha Nilsen Heintzelman Greene Oral History Interview, 1982

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Greene, Clara Oleva Josepha Nilsen Heintzelman
<b>Title</b>	Clara Oleva Josepha Nilsen Heintzelman Greene Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 3 photographs 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t156
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Clara Oleva Josepha Nilsen Heintzelman Greene , 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

Clara Greene was born on March 21, 1895 in Elde, Hinnøya, Norway. Elde is in northern Norway near Borkenes. Clara's parents were Karen Pedersen Nilsen and Ole Nilsen, and there were five other children in the family: Hilda, Ellen, Nellie, Marie, and Olaf. Clara's father was a fisherman, and in 1898, he drowned near the island of Senja. Karen worked as a midwife after Clara's father died, and her sister encouraged Karen to bring the family to America, where they would have an easier life. Clara's aunt was living in Aberdeen, Washington at this time.

In September 1901, the family emigrated except for Nellie, age 10, and Marie, age 8, who had to stay behind until Clara's mother could earn enough money to send for them. They ended up staying in Norway until 1911. In Aberdeen, Clara's family stayed with her aunt for several months, and then Clara's mother married John Berg. John was from Hinnøya and had been living in both Aberdeen and Astoria, Oregon while he worked for a fish cannery. Clara was sent to live with Hilda, who had also

recently married, and her mother and Olaf moved to Astoria. Karen and John had three children: Emil, Oscar, and Julius. Clara went through the eighth grade in six years, and after she finished, she went to Portland, Oregon and became employed by a paper box factory. However, the glue at the factory made her sick, and she returned to Astoria. By this time, Nellie and Marie were also in Astoria, but Nellie had contracted TB while in Norway and died within a year. The doctor thought Clara had TB also, but she just needed to recover from her exposure to the glue at the factory.

When she was feeling better, she met a man she had attended Sunday school with. His sisters did office work in canneries, and Clara decided she wanted to go into this line of work as well. With financial help from her mother, she attended a business college. In 1919, Clara married Lyle Heintzelman and had a son, Lyle Heintzelman Jr., in 1920. The family lived in Hoquiam, WA for three years and then moved to Astoria. In 1938, Clara and Lyle divorced, and Clara moved to Aberdeen. She then worked for the State in Olympia for seven years. In 1942, she married Leroy Greene, but this marriage did not last either, and they divorced six years later. Clara returned to Norway in 1971 and 1976 and remains in contact with her relatives in Harstad, Norway. Having emigrated at such a young age, Clara does not know much about Norwegian traditions but can understand the language.

### Lineage

Full Name: Clara Oleva Josepha Nilsen Greene. Maiden Name: Klara Oleva Josepha Nilsen. Father: Ole Mathias Nilsen. Step-Father: John Berg. Mother: Karen Lavina Pedersen. Paternal Grandfather: Johan Nilsen. Paternal Grandmother: Jensine E. Hansen. Maternal Grandfather: Peder Johansen. Maternal Grandmother: Ellen Kristina Karoline Hansen. Brothers and Sisters: Hilda Marie Nilsen, Ellen C. Nilsen, Nellie Nilsen, Marie H. Nilsen, Olaf Nilsen. Half-Brothers: Emil Palmer Berg, Oscar Karl Berg, Julius Palmer Berg. Spouse: Lyle W. Heintzelman, Leroy A. Greene. Children: Lyle W. Heintzelman Jr.

## Content Description

This interview was conducted with Clara Greene on March 25, 1982 in Tacoma, Washington. It provides information about her family background, emigration, settling in, schooling, work, marriage and family, and Norwegian heritage. The interview also contains an article on her father, Ole Mathias Nilsen, from a Norwegian publication, an article on Clara from Nordlandsposten, and three photographs of Clara at the time of the interview. 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

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<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv35571>

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

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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	
156, side 1	020: Klara Oleva Nilsen Green. Born near Borkenes, Norway on Hinnøya. This is in northern Norway. Borkenes is on the same island as Harstad. Born on March 21, 1895.
156, side 1	116: PARENTS Karen Pedersen Nilsen (remarried Berg after coming to America) and Ole Nilsen. They were from the same area. Father was born on Kvæøya, a small island near Hinnøya. He was a fisherman.
156, side 1	189: GRANDPARENTS

Container(s)	Description
	: Maternal, Ellen Kristina Karoline Hansen and Peder Johansen. He was a fisherman. Paternal, Johan Nilsen and Jensine Hansen. He was probably a fisherman. (See also I-315)
156, side 1	235: Father was a fisherman. (See also I-116)
156, side 1	241: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Five girls and one boy from Clara's mother's first marriage. Hilda married in America. Ellen married in America. Nellie and Marie were left in Norway when the others came to the U.S. Their mother didn't have enough money. They came to America later. Youngest brother, Olaf, came in 1901. Only three then. Became a mechanic. Owned a garage in Oakridge, Oregon. Traveled a lot.
156, side 1	315: GRANDPARENTS Remembers her grandfather but not her grandmother. Grandfather's son, John Pedersen came to America. John's father was alone in Norway. John brought him to Aberdeen, Washington. Clara's mother had a sister in Aberdeen. That's how they happened to settle here. (See also I-189)
156, side 1	343: CHILDHOOD Left Norway when six years old. Lived near the ocean on a small farm, given to them by Clara's maternal grandfather. Clara's father drowned in 1898 while fishing. Three of them were out in a big boat, near the island of Senja (northwest of Hinnøya). Father tied himself to the mast as the boat floundered. He was found on Vardø, which is around the North Cape, five months later. His only son was born one month later.
156, side 1	440: CHILDHOOD Saw her childhood home on her trip to Norway in 1972. As children they used to play by the water, not far from the house. They'd gather the green moss from the rocks by the water, dry it, and feed it to the cows. Many little farms in the area. They'd play on a big flat rock by the rocks. Clara slipped off once. An older boy grabbed her hair and pulled her back up. Remembers Elde, where her grandfather lived. Had to go to Borkenes for supplies.
156, side 1	515: In that part of Norway, "torve" (peat) was used for fuel in the winter. Clara describes how they collected this. Oldest child was 13 when their father died. Neighbors helps each other.
156, side 1	555: Mother was a midwife after father died. An older woman who lived nearby would stay with the children while their mother was gone. She would always cook a big pot of mush for the kids. Clara tells a story about when they put a "luug" (heavy wool sock) in the mush.

Container(s)	Description
156, side 1	614: Clara's mother's sister, Mary Gyllne (?), kept writing to them from Aberdeen, Washington. She came to Montesano, Washington first. She said they'd have an easier life in the U.S. They left Norway in September 1901. Uncle John and her grandfather came later. (See also I-315).
156, side 1	659: As a kid didn't think too much about leaving. They were busy getting ready to leave. Had to weave their own material for new dresses. Had to leave two girls behind. They stayed with families their mother knew, Nellie, 10, and Marie, 8. They came to the U.S. later. Then mother remarried.
156, side 1	746: TRIP OVER Had to travel by boat. Possible that they left from Bodø. Went down through the English Channel. Took some kind of train to Liverpool, England. Took a Canadian boat. Many people on the boat. Many got sick. Clara got her first stocking cap before they left. Tragedy when it blew off into the ocean. Remembers eating her first orange while in England. Landed in Portland, Maine.
156, side 1	844: TRAIN TRIP Clara's aunt had sent a train ticket for the eldest sister. They had to have \$100 when they landed. Mother had to provide her own train ticket. Mother's ticket was on Northern Pacific. Sister's ticket was on the Canadian Pacific. Clara went with her eldest sister through Canada. Mother and other two children got to Aberdeen, Washington a few days before Clara and Hilda. Clara recognized her mother's hat when they came into the station in Aberdeen. The train trip took several days. Had to change trains in Winnipeg. Tells about the first Indian they saw.
156, side 1	964: LANGAUGE DIFFICULTIES Couldn't speak English, but ran into many Scandinavians in Canada.
156, side 1	975: Stayed with aunt for several months. Then mother remarried, John Berg. He was from the island of Hinnøya in northern Norway. He had been living in both Aberdeen, Washington and Astoria, Oregon. Worked in a fish cannery. Oldest sister got married at about the same time. She'd been working in a boardinghouse. Met a young man there, John Lundgren. Clara stayed with them. Mother moved to Astoria with her husband. She was a laundress. Helped the sisters in the Catholic Church. Sold products for the California Perfume Company which is now Avon.
156, side 1	1066: HALF-BROTHERS Mother had three sons with John Berg. Emil became a county assessor in Astoria, Oregon. Oscar moved to Portland. Worked for the U.S. Department of

Container(s)	Description
	Health. Went to law school. Julius went to California. Got married. Worked for the state of California.
156, side 2	006: Stayed with her sister for about a year and a half. 10 years old when she was sent to stay with cousins in Roy, Washington. Hadn't been to school much. Cousin wrote to Clara's mother that arrangement should be made.
156, side 2	101: A couple in Tacoma, Washington wanted a little girl. They lived on the outskirts, on a little farm. There was a school nearby. Clara couldn't speak much English. Didn't understand why she had to be there. They tried to be nice to her. Bought her a Japanese doll for Christmas. Like waving the red flag. In Norway, kids teased her because one of her eyes is slanted. The lady took her back to Aberdeen after five months.
156, side 2	194: Clara went to school in Aberdeen, Washington. Stayed with her sister. Went through the eighth grade in six years. Was 16 years old by then.
156, side 2	231: She stayed in Astoria, Oregon with her mother for a year and a half. Finished school there.
156, side 2	242: Went to Portland after she finished the eighth grade. Had a friend there that she'd met in Astoria. Got a job at a paper box factory in Portland. Stayed with her friend's family. Describes her job. Got sick because of the glue they used. Went back to Astoria.
156, side 2	310: Nellie and Marie came from Norway to Astoria in 1911. Nellie was doing housework in Astoria. She'd contracted TB while in Norway and died within a year. The doctor who'd examined Nellie, said that Clara had TB too. She didn't.
156, side 2	374: Clara went to Redmond, Washington where her sisters, Ellen and Marie were. They were both married. Clara stayed there for eight months. Got better because she wasn't around the glue (in the factory) anymore.
156, side 2	394: Would have gone onto high school, but she didn't have the money. Met a young man she'd gone to Sunday school with. He had two sisters who worked in canneries in Astoria, Oregon. They did office work. Clara wanted to do that kind of work. Clara was staying with her aunt in Aberdeen, Washington. Her mother sent money. She went to Business College. Took penmanship,

Container(s)	Description
	bookkeeping, and other courses that one wouldn't take now. Went to this school for eight months. Later took typing and went to night school.
156, side 2	<p>463: MARRIAGE</p> <p>Married her son's father in 1919. His name was Lyle Heintzelman. Met him while working in Hoquiam, Washington for M.M. Stewart who sold cars. Lyle was working in the woods, just outside of Hoquiam. He and 3 or 4 others bought cars from this garage. He'd go to make payments once a month. They were married in Montesano, Washington. They lived in Hoquiam for three years, then moved to Astoria, Oregon. Their son's name is Lyle Heintzelman. Her husband was out of work often. Clara always had to work. They got divorced in 1933.</p>
156, side 2	<p>608:</p> <p>Lived in Aberdeen after the divorce. Worked for the state in Olympia for about seven years. Had friend who lived in Olympia. She worked at several office including the State Liquor Board. Clara's son, Lyle started university in the fall of 1937. She had to pay for it. He went to for three years. Then the war broke out. Clara didn't have money for him to finish. He worked for the Mt. Rainier Ordinance for 20 years.</p>
156, side 2	<p>660:</p> <p>Tells about her son's muscular dystrophy and when they discovered he had it.</p>
156, side 2	<p>775:</p> <p>Met Mr. Greene at J.W. Gibson's cleaning establishment. They both worked there. That marriage didn't work out either.</p>
156, side 2	<p>790: TRIPS TO NORWAY</p> <p>First trip back was in 1971. 70 years after she left. Went with a cousin who lives in Seattle. Cousin's family lived on Kvaeoeya, where Clara's father was born. Met mostly her cousin's relatives on that trip. Went again in 1976. Took her brother's daughter with her. Had a wonderful trip. Visited relatives on Hinnoeya and a second cousin in Bodo. He works for Bennet Travel Bureau. Brought a group to the U.S. in 1976 just before Clara went to Norway. They met briefly in 1971.</p>
156, side 2	<p>848: NORWEGIAN TRADITIONS</p> <p>Doesn't know much about this. Didn't have time to learn this. Had to work.</p>
156, side 2	<p>864: NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE</p> <p>Understands it. Had to speak Norwegian with some to the older relatives who couldn't speak English (1971, 1976). Her niece can't understand it or speak it.</p>
156, side 2	<p>876:</p> <p>One of her mother's relatives has a store in Harstad, Norway. They always send her things. Another relative is an elder in the church in Norway. Related</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>on her father's side. Hadn't been in contact before. Found out they were in Harstad. Hadn't been in contact before. Found out they were in Harstad. Visited them at their hotel. Writes to them now. Found some relatives (from father's side) in Borkenes. Took a trip to Norway in 1967 through Nordlandslaget. Was in Bergen.</p>

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Education--Norway  
 Emigration and immigration  
 Family--Norway  
 Marriage service  
 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 :

Greene, Clara --Interviews  
 (creator)  
 Berg, John  
 Greene, Leroy  
 Hansen, Jensine  
 Heintzelman Jr., Lyle  
 Heintzelman Sr., Lyle  
 Nilsen, Johan  
 Hansen, Ellen  
 Johansen, Peder  
 Nilsen, Ole  
 Pedersen, Karen

### Family Names :

Berg family  
 Greene family  
 Hansen family  
 Heintzelman family  
 Johansen family  
 Nilsen family  
 Pedersen family

### Geographical Names :

Aberdeen (Wash.)  
 Astoria (Or.)  
 Borkenes (Norway)  
 Harstad (Norway)  
 Hinnøya (Norway)  
 Hoquiam (Wash.)



Portland (Or.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Bookkeepers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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