

# Olaf Sivertson Oral History Interview, 1981

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Sivertson, Olaf
<b>Title</b>	Olaf Sivertson Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1981 (inclusive) 1981 1981
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 2 sound cassette 3 compact discs
<b>Collection Number</b>	t063-069
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Olaf Sivertson, 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

Olaf Sivertson was born on December 15, 1884 in Raftsund, Norway to Sivert Saether and Johanna Mikkelson. Sivert was a farmer and fisherman, and there were four other children in the family: Inga, Sigrid, Magnus, and Marianna. Olaf finished school when he was fifteen years old and then began fishing in Lofoten from February to April and farming during the summer. Olaf intended to become a teacher and was even accepted to attend teachers' school in Tromso, Norway, but his friends convinced him to immigrate to America. Olaf left Norway on May 22, 1902 and settled in Tacoma, WA. Upon his arrival to Tacoma, Olaf first obtained a job a door factory and later began working for a sawmill. After he hurt his back at the sawmill, his friend, Clinton Flowers, helped him get a job as a tallyman (lumber grader), and Olaf went to Calameth, WA. He was later employed at logging camps in Lacey, Castle Rock, and in the Black Hills in Washington. However, after he was injured again, he became employed as a painter and later a cement contractor. Olaf met his wife, Helga Johnson in 1906, and they had seven children: Sigvard, Magda (Lipoma), Arthur, Bernice (Kleinschmidt), Olive (Entenmann), Helen (Forck), and Esther (Haugen). Olaf wanted to raise his family in the country, so he bought ten acres in Mountain View and built a home there. Through the years, Olaf evolved into a jack-of-all-trades. In addition to the timber industry, painting, and cement contracting, he has made traps, dug clams, berry farmed, and owned a chicken farm. Olaf was appointed Road Forman for the district

in 1922, County Road Supervisor in 1928, has served on the School Board, and has also been involved in the Water Company and Telephone Company. In addition, he is a member of the Washington Co-Op Agriculture Association, the Washington Berry Growers, and the Mountain View Church. Since his retirement, Olaf has become interested in writing and has written the history of Washington and assembled the church's history. He has never returned to Norway and is also working on his family history.

### Lineage

Full Name: Olaf Sivertson. Father: Sivert Haagensen Saether. Mother: Johanna Mikkelson. Brothers and Sisters: Inga Sivertson, Sigurd Sivertson, Magnus Sivertson, Marianna Sivertson. Spouse: Helga Johnson. Children: Sigvard Sivertson, Magda Lipoma, Arthur Sivertson, Bernice Klainschmidt, Olive Entenmann, Helen Forck, Esther Haugen.

## Content Description

Interviews with Olaf Sivertson were conducted on June 24, 1981 and July 15, 1981 in Tacoma, Washington. The interviews contain information on family background, emigration, employment, marriage and family, and church and community involvement. The interview also contains: a letter of appreciation from Olaf's granddaughter, Sally Morrison, a letter from Olaf, a memorandum concerning the Norwegian texts Olaf donated to PLU, an inventory of the Olaf Sivertson library, a copy of Olaf's family history, and two articles on Olaf writing the area history in his late nineties. The interview was conducted 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 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

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<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv37964>

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/CD	
Cassette	
63, side 1	013/08: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Born on December 15, 1884 in Raftsund, Norway which is the sound which divides the two islands, Lofoten and Hinnøya. The farm was called Raftstrand.
63, side 1	026: PARENTS Johanna Mikkelson and Sivert Haagensen Saether. He was a farmer. It was customary to take the father's name.
63, side 1	034: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Inga married a farmer Olaf Vilhelmson (?). Sigurd became a teacher and wrote books. Magnus became a shoemaker.
63, side 1	048: GRADE SCHOOL (Norway) Completed at age 15. Fished for cod in Lofoten after his school days.
63, side 1	053: FATHER'S OCCUPATION Both a farmer and a fisherman that was the way to make a living.
63, side 1	060:

Container(s)	Description
	<p>Brother in Lofoten helped him get a job. It was rough life, but life of the young. Fisherman from February to April and a farmer in the summer. They fished out of an "ottring" which was an open boat.</p>
63, side 1	<p>096: PARTNERS IN FISHING ADVENTURE January 1901 caught herring along the north coast of Norway in a sailing vessel. Went to Nordkapp.</p>
63, side 1	<p>105/09: MIDNIGHT SUN Really beautiful from late May to the first part of July.</p>
63, side 1	<p>112: FARM CHORES Raised hay for the cattle, had vegetables. The kids would herd the cattle and milk in the evenings. In later years they would help with cutting hay and getting ready for the winter.</p>
63, side 1	<p>151/10: FISHING EXPEDITION That was life, kind of a hard life. Close shaves, bad storms at sea.</p>
63, side 1	<p>171: TEACHER Always his intention to become a teacher. He was accepted to attend teacher's school in Tromsø, Norway. Friends talked him into coming to America. Father gave him an English book to study.</p>
63, side 1	<p>191: FATHER Was a carpenter and a mason. He had spent five years in America. He could speak English. In 1889 lots of emigrants were leaving for America. Father fixed up the farm with the money he made in the U.S.</p>
63, side 1	<p>240/11: BROTHERS' OCCUPATION One teacher, one farmer, both decided to go to America. They came back to Norway as he left for America. They worked on farms and in the woods.</p>
63, side 1	<p>264: BOAT TRIP Left on May 22, 1902. Went from Trondheim to Bergen. Traveled on a cattle boat which had been rigged up for immigrants (very primitive). Went from Hull, England and by train to Liverpool where they stayed at an immigrant hotel. They left from England on the Pretorian (?) of the Cunard Line, very nice.</p>
63, side 1	<p>324/12/13: LANDED IN QUEBEC Took an immigrant across Canada to Sumas, Washington. A neighbor from the old valley lived in Tacoma.</p>
63, side 1	<p>360: LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES</p>

Container(s)	Description
	Spoke little English when they arrived. The immigrant is pretty much taken care of from the beginning to the end of the trip.
63, side 1	384: LANDED IN TACOMA Eight people in a cab to a friend's. Renting a house for all eight.
63, side 1	411/14: FEELINGS LEAVING NORWAY No great feeling about it.
63, side 1	424: IMPRESSIONS OF TACOMA It was new. Met other Norwegians (a Norwegian colony around K Street).
63, side 1	454: LOOKING FOR WORK Wheeler, Osgood Co., a sash and door factory. Learned English from his work partner. Earned \$1.50 per 10-hour day.
63, side 1	494/15: SAW MILL Ran the slab saw. Hard work. Earned \$1.75 per day. Cousin went to work at the Kapowsin Lumber Co.
63, side 1	533: ROOMING HOUSE 15th and D Street. \$3 monthly for room. Berglund Brothers for breakfast 5 cents to 10 cents for lunch. 10 cents for a hot meal at a Japanese restaurant.
63, side 1	566: SUNDAY Got together with friends.
63, side 1	576/01: LUXURY Scandinavian bookstore owned by Wessle and Egbert (Swede). This was on Pacific Avenue. Every Saturday night he bought a Norwegian book. He also looked at the Decorah Posten, the Tacoma Tidene and the Scandinavian.
63, side 1	597: DEPRESSION Twenty banks were closed. The people were afraid of banks. Didn't use paper money, but gold and silver instead. Olaf had a money belt he wore all the time.
63, side 1	647 Loaned money to a friend. (Continued on side 2)
63, side 2	016/02: CLINTON FLOWERS Olaf loaned him money so that he could keep his land. Olaf lived with this family for one year. This helped improve his English. He took the streetcar to work.
63, side 2	049: SAW MILL ACCIDENT

Container(s)	Description
	Hurt his back and was laid up for one month. Clinton Flowers helped him get a job as a tallyman (lumber grader). Went to Cathlamet, Washington to do this too.
63, side 2	097/03: LETTER FROM SISTER IN NORWAY The family was coming to America. He built a home on J Street.
63, side 2	139: CITIZENSHIP In 1910 he applied when he knew he wasn't going back to Norway.
63, side 2	155/04: EMPLOYMENT Employed at lumber camps in Lacey, Washington, Castle Rock, Washington and in the Black Hills in Washington. He was a knoter and cleaned off all knots from the trees. He was injured and sent to the hospital.
63, side 2	186: EMPLOYED AS A PAINTER Learned to paint and hang paper. The union came in and he didn't apply for apprenticeship so he was fired. The other family members were very independent.
63, side 2	215: CEMENT CONTRACTOR Cement finisher and onto foreman, he worked himself up the ladder.
63, side 2	223/05: MEETING WIFE December 1906 he married Helga Johnson.
63, side 2	238: BOUGHT LOTS New 23rd Street, he built a family home. In 1907 his brother came to America and they went into business together and formed Sivertson Brothers and Williams (contracting cementing firm). This lasted until 1917.
63, side 2	263: ALASKA Friend asked him to be kind of an understudy to him and worked with setting up the gear for the fish traps. They went to Cook Inlet and to Seldovia, Alaska. This was a five-month season. He went because during WWI the prices went crazy here in trying to get materials for contracting work.
63, side 2	287/06: 1910 Bought 10 acres in Mountain View. Tells the story behind how Mountain View got its name. They cleared the land and built a home. He lived in a tent until the house was ready. Nels Merk (?) thought that the activity was from Indians in the woods. Norwegian community.
63, side 2	373/07: MOUNTAIN VIEW CHURCH

Container(s)	Description
	Used to be called Puyallup Lutheran Church. In 1909 they built a small church. Elected secretary of the church in 1912. The members were Norwegian. In 1918 they had their first English Sunday school.
63, side 2	430: IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH TO COMMUNITY It was the center of Mountain View, a social center.
63, side 2	444/08: CHRISTMAS Always had Sunday school program. 1912 the church added on. In 1965, a new church was built. Church is an important part of Scandinavian life.
63, side 2	523/09: CHILDREN Sigvard, Magda, Arthur, Bernice, Olive, Helen, and Esther. His mother was a practical nurse. A midwife delivered the first three of them and the rest had doctor's care.
63, side 2	568: NEVER RETURNED TO NORWAY Really didn't think of it. Wife refused to go. Corresponds with his brother in Norway.
63, side 2	607: SPEAKING NORWEGIAN Out of practice.
63, side 2	615: IMMIGRATION Satisfied with the move he took. Had an interesting life. Wife is now deceased.
63, side 2	658/10: Not as active in church. Superintendent for 42 years. School director for nine years. Community activities included the Berry Association, the Water Company and the Telephone Company.
69, side 1	011/11: HOW HE CAME TO MOUNTAIN VIEW Wanted to raise his family in the country where the air was clean and there was plenty of room.
69, side 1	029: CLEARING THE LAND Bought a team of horses and used them to pull the stumps. Also used dynamite. Cleared an acre year.
69, side 1	100/12: Plowing for the neighbors with the team. Went back to cement work and cleared land part time. Tells a story about his dog that survived a stump blast.
69, side 1	120: SELLING CORD WOOD

Container(s)	Description
	Former owner of Olaf's land retained rights to the timber. Not a great deal of money to be made, 50/50 deal.
69, side 1	140/13: LIFE FOR THE FAMILY AS THE CLEARING PROCESS WENT ON Built a two-room house and later built on. It was a lot of hard work, but an enjoyable life.
69, side 1	170: ACTIVE TIME - FALL OF 1910 Young People's Society organized. It was a center for community social life. Choir organized, still singing today. Sunday school was organized.
69, side 1	189/14: WOMEN'S RESPONSIBILTIES AND LIFE Ladies Aide in conjunction with the church. Busy with the children and they had much to help with.
69, side 1	200: BARN AND CHICKEN HOUSE Lumber for them was taken from his woods. Raised chickens, sold eggs, and later sold milk.
69, side 1	224/15: JOURNEYS TO ALASKA Uncertain weather, 1917 in Alaska. Worked for NW Fish Co. (see tape 69 Side 2 263) Family stayed home. Employed at Fort Lewis. Cement contractor after Alaska.
69, side 1	285: GREAT DEMAND FOR LUMBER Neighbors got together to build a sawmill. Mr. Murphy headed this. This was mostly a Norwegian community.
69, side 1	318/01: 1919 WENT TO ALASKA AGAIN Offered a good deal. Jack-of-all trades. Did painting, fishing, making traps, etc. The founder of this area, Peter Bushman graduated from Pacific Lutheran College. This area was known as the little Norway of Alaska. The was Scow Bay which is south of St. Petersburg, Alaska.
69, side 1	410/02: Worked at home at a sawmill and then back to Alaska, almost a routine. Depression set in.
69, side 1	524/03: CLAM DIGGING (ALASKA) Cannery went bankrupt and was taken over. This was the last year he went to Alaska, he had had enough. Had a Chinese crew which stayed on, but they had no food and no credit so they had to live off the land.
69, side 1	611: BERRY FARMING



Container(s)	Description
	Good price during the war. Now 28 cents a pound. In 1902 raspberries were 3 cents a pound and blackberries were one cent a pound.
69, side 2	005/04: Member of Washington Berry Growers. Mr. Murphy sold the mill got co-op. Contracted to do some logging.
69, side 2	020: COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES Active in the church. Telephone Company and how the Mountain View Telephone Company received its' name. Director of the school board.
69, side 2	045: EDWARD SCHOOL Used to be the only school in the area. Mountain View held school at church in 1909. In 1910 they built the first schoolhouse.
69, side 2	067/05: SPEAKING NORWEGIAN Oldest son spoke Norwegian until his school days. After this the children began speaking English at home.
69, side 2	074: CHILDREN Sigvard, Magda, Arthur, Bernice, Olive, Helen, and Esther. Olaf's mother was a midwife. (see also tape 63 side 2 523)
69, side 2	107: CHILDREN'S DUTIES All busy. Picked berries and whatever needed to be done around the farm, no idleness.
69, side 2	120/06: 1922 ELECTION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONER Appointed Road Foreman for the district. In 1928 he was appointed County Road Supervisor. Terminated in 1932.
69, side 2	145: STAYED ON THE FARM Had 2500 chickens and some cows. Full time farmer. Joined the Washington Co-op Agriculture Association (since 1926).
69, side 2	165: WASHINGTON BERRY PACKER'S ASSOCIATION Director in the late 1940's. Became involved in the water company.
69, side 2	191/07: BERRY FARMING A lot of work, little money. Later concentrated on the chicken business and selling eggs. Had a hire hand, John Funk, who was later drafted during WWII.
69, side 2	239/08: SON SIGVARD Wanted to join the Army (1941). He damaged his lungs and went into the chicken business. Was a machinist.

Container(s)	Description
69, side 2	281: Retired in 1956 at the age of 72. Wife is deceased. Has never returned to Norway. Grandson, Carl Entenman visited Norway. Family associated with PLC, became teachers and a nurse.
69, side 2	365/09: INTERESTED IN WRITING Wrote the history of Washington. Assembled the churches history to preserve it.
69, side 2	396: INTERESTED IN FAMILY HISTORY Started writing it 20 years ago. Received information from Norway.
69, side 2	424/10: EARLY HISTORY OF WASHINGTON STATE Early immigrants, Hudson's Bay Co., Olympia, Steilacoom, Seattle, Tacoma, Puyallup, Sumner, Edwards community, Parkland, and PLC.
69, side 2	479: SPECIAL THOUGHTS OF THE AREA Beautiful, good community. Church started out of six families, today there are over 1,200 members.
69, side 2	530/11: AFTER RETIREMENT Sold land and have one acre today. Talks about his wife's illness before her death.
69, side 2	563: REFLECTS BACK ON THE OLDEN DAYS When you get older you look back and remember. The reasons why he's interested in early history. He's part of the land, history, and feels close to the development.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Emigration and immigration  
 Family--Norway  
 Marriage service  
 Naturalization  
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs  
 Ocean travel  
 Railroad travel

### Personal Names :

Entenmann, Olive  
 Flowers, Clinton  
 Forck, Helen  
 Haugen, Esther

Johnson, Helga  
Kleinschmidt, Bernice  
Sivertson, Arthur  
Sivertson, Olaf--Interviews  
(creator)  
Lipoma, Magda  
Mikkelson, Johanna  
Saether, Sivert  
Sivertson, Sigvard

**Corporate Names :**

Mountain View Lutheran Church (Puyallup, Wash.)  
Pretoria (Steamship)

**Family Names :**

Entenmann family  
Forck family  
Haugen family  
Johnson family  
Kleinschmidt family  
Lipoma family  
Mikkelson family  
Saether family  
Sivertson family

**Geographical Names :**

Mountain View (Wash.)  
Raftsund (Norway)  
Tacoma (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Loggers  
Painters  
Sawmill workers  
Trappers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
2004