

Jens Solvik Oral History Interview, 1982

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Solvik, Jens
Title	Jens Solvik Oral History Interview
Dates	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
Quantity	3 file folders 2 photographs 1 sound cassette
Collection Number	t215
Summary	An oral history interview with Jens Solvik, 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

Jens Solvik was born Jens Berg Andreason on September 5, 1903 in Solvik, Norway, which is located 55 kilometers east of Bodø on the southern shore of Øvrevatnet. His parents were Bernhard Andreason and Marie Wickstrøm, and there were five other children in the family: Annette, Peder, Norman, Alfred, and Bjarne. Bernhard was a common laborer, and Marie was a homemaker. Bernhard immigrated to Bellingham, WA in 1910, in hopes of making more money and returning to Norway in a few years; he never returned. When Jens was seventeen years old, he began working in the copper mines, but due to health problems, he had to quit after two years. Jens had stomach ulcers, and they were terribly irritated by the copper and sulfur fumes in the mines. In May of 1923, he immigrated to Bellingham, where his brother Norman also lived at this time. For the first two years he was there, Jens worked a fishing trap arranged by Norman and at a sawmill, and then worked in the woods for the next fifteen years at a Saxon-Norway camp. He married Myrtle Hillard in 1927 and has two children, Gerald Neil and (Marvin) Gene. Jens retired in 1968 and visited Norway the summer of the following year. He and Myrtle stayed for three weeks and had a wonderful visit. Jens's mother and brothers, Peder and Alfred, were still there. Jens and Myrtle returned again in 1973, and spent much of their time visiting Myrtle's relatives.

Lineage

Full Name: Jens Berg Andreason Solvik. Father: Bernhard Andreason. Mother: Marie Wickstrøm. Brothers and Sisters: Annette Andreason, Peder Andreason, Norman Andreason, Alfred Andreason, Bjarne Andreason. Spouse: Myrtle Hillard. Children: Gerald Neil Solvik, (Marvin) Gene Solvik.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Jens Solvik on December 16, 1982 in Everson, Washington. It contains information on family background, emigration, work, marriage and family, and return trips to Norway. The interview also includes two black and white photographs of Jens in 1982. 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 Cindy Klein 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	
215, side 1	009: Jens Solvik. Born Jens Berg Andreason in Solvik, Nordland, Norway on December 5, 1903. (Solvik is about 55 km due east of Bodø on the southern shore of Øvrevatnet.)
215, side 1	022: PARENTS Father was Bernhard Andreason, and mother was Marie Wickstrøm. Mother's job was a housewife with six kids. Father worked as a common laborer - whatever he could find.
215, side 1	048: Solvik - the family home. (Points and refers to a picture of the area hanging on the wall.) "There were about five or six families that lived on a chunk of land sticking out into the lake"; one was his. This small, isolated community was on Solvik Lake (The name of the entire lake is Øvrevatnet).
215, side 1	060: FAMILY LIFE Had a good family home life with five boys and one sister. Father left Norway when Jens was about 7-8 years old (1910) and emigrated to America. An older brother, Norman, emigrated in 1922, and Jens in 1923 to Bellingham, WA where his father and brother were.
215, side 1	090: BROTHERS AND SISTERS There were six children: Annette, Peder, Norman, Jens, Alfred, and Bjarne.
215, side 1	118: CHURCH The state church was rather weak there and difficult for the family to attend. In summer they rowed down the long lake to reach the church, and in winter, they used a horse and sleigh.

Container(s)	Description
215, side 1	<p>129: SCHOOL</p> <p>When Jens first began school, there was no schoolhouse. The teacher alternated one month at the Andreason home with 10-12 kids and the next month at another small village across the water.</p>
215, side 1	<p>153: GRANDPARENTS</p> <p>The names are not given, but Jens remembers seeing both sets of grandparents who lived a ways off. His mother's family could be reached by rowing (or skiing in winter) across the fresh water lake to the saltwater. Sometimes the water and the trip were pretty rough, got there only twice.</p>
215, side 1	<p>190:</p> <p>His father's family lived in a different area but the trip was also hard: crossed a mountain, rowed across salt water, and climbed another mountain. He can remember visiting only once as a small boy - his first night away from home and being homesick.</p>
215, side 1	<p>223:</p> <p>The grandfather on his father's side split wood for Jens' family. Jens was struck by the great big, heavy fishing mittens he used for chopping wood. They knit great big things and kept working it until the wool "grew together" and the wool mittens fit - thick (quarter inch) and warm.</p>
215, side 1	<p>237:</p> <p>(Takes interviewer to look at the picture of his home on the wall.) The family made a living by mining and logging. In summer there was a tow-boat that hauled copper ore from the end of the lake to the saltwater (Fauskevidt and Skjerstadsfjorden). In winter when the lake was frozen over with two - three feet of ice, the Andreasons hauled groceries to the copper mine and copper ore back to the saltwater using a sled and a little white horse. The whole family chopped birch in the mountain woods and sold it in 2x4x8 foot piles (about half a cord). Made quite a bit of money because the whole family - the little kids and even mother - could work at it. "She (mother) had to work like a horse most of her life." But, she was happy and strong.</p>
215, side 1	<p>284: JENS' WORK</p> <p>Jens worked two years in the copper mine; he needed to be 18, but lied one year about his age and was put on. Jens emigrated because of health-work problems at the mine. He had ulcers, and the copper and sulfur fumes created when the raw ore was broken via a sledge hammer irritated his stomach ulcers horribly.</p>
215, side 1	<p>305: EMIGRATION</p> <p>Jens emigrated at 19 years of age taking a long, circuitous route. He took the little lake boat to reach the saltwater at Finneid and a local fjord boat (which stopped at many little places) from Fauske to Bodø. From there he changed to a larger boat which took him to Trondheim from where he traveled to Oslo</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>by train, changing trains to reach Bergen. At Bergen he boarded a boat for Southhampton, England (? someplace where they had great big horses that dragged beer wagons). A train took him to Liverpool, where he caught a boat to Canada (probably Quebec - a big city up the river), then the Canadian-Pacific railroad to Vancouver, and finally to Bellingham, Washington.</p>
215, side 1	<p>365: ARRIVAL IN AMERICA Jens arrived in Bellingham at 5-6 pm on a May evening during the tulip festival. He had no knowledge of English, but had enough sense to give a taxi driver his brother's Bellingham address written on a piece of newspaper. Norman was out fishing for the summer, but his friend and roommate, Ole Hill, was Norwegian, and made Jens feel at home by speaking Norwegian, and took him to his father's place that very night. His father was home in his little apartment - "sprucing himself up" because he had a date. "Yeah. He had a date." Then the date came, and Bernhard bought Jens a ticket to travel to his aunt's house. Jens arrived at Anne Ellingsons's home, and this became his headquarters when not working. Anne had a nice home and five young, nice kids.</p>
215, side 1	<p>435: FATHER He had the idea in Norway that a lot of money could be made in America. He thought he'd do that for two years, then come back and fix up - build a new house - "a real big shot". He never returned, never had a gold mine or nothing. Died a poor man without friends in an old folks home in the south side of Bellingham.</p>
215, side 1	<p>463: BROTHER Norman was a year and a half older than Jens. He worked on the fish traps in Puget Sound until that became illegal. Then he fished long summers in Alaska, later working for the pile-driving union in Seattle making good wages. He was married with one son, and died two years ago.</p>
215, side 1	<p>485: WORK IN AMERICA For the first two years (1923-25), Jens worked at fishing (a fish trap job arranged by Norman) and at a sawmill in the south part of Bellingham. He and Norman rented an apartment that was handy to work. From 1925-1940 he worked in the woods at the Saxon-Norway Camp.</p>
215, side 1	<p>509: In 1932, his ulcer flared up, and he had an operation in Bellingham to close a thumb-sized hole in his stomach burned through by gastric juices. When his ulcer flared up again 10 years later, he went to the Mayo Clinic in MN. It's been fine since, and "it's some feeling" not to have a stomachache.</p>
215, side 1	<p>524: MEETING SPOUSE Jens was injured in the woods while "bucking" logs - cutting felled trees into log lines or sections. Though properly warned, one falling tree "brushed" him, cracking his hipbone. He was treated in the Bellingham hospital, and</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>recuperated at his aunt's place - got to walking around and feeling pretty good. His friend and partner, Ole, drove over in Jens' Model T Ford accompanied by Myrtle Hillard (?). Jens went along on a young folks outing to climb Smith Peak. He and this girl looked at and "kind of like each other". In the evening they took the Model T into town to a show and had an ice cream sundae; he took her home and made a date for another evening - pretty quick. "And so, that kept getting hotter and hotter all the time!" Jens thought many times that the Lord had a hand in it - the tree falling on him, Ole coming round, and then meeting Myrtle.</p>
215, side 1	<p>565: LEARNING ENGLISH When Jens was in the sawmill, he worked with "a little bit of a guy" - doesn't know his nationality - who doggedly corrected his English and helped him more than anyone - except his wife. After marriage, he had a good teacher.</p>
215, side 1	<p>579: CITIZENSHIP With the help of his wife, he studied and memorized a big thick book about the Constitution and the whole US government. Answered a few questions before the judge at the courthouse, and received his papers the next day. Jens changed his name from Andreason to Solvik, taking the home place name like his brother and father.</p>
215, side 1	<p>603: CHILDREN: Jens and Myrtle were married in 1927. They have two children: Gerald Neil born November 8, 1928 and (Marvin) Gene born August 20, 1933. Neil married Clara Smith from Whatcom, and they have three children: Kevin, Steven, and Karen Marie. Both Jens' sons attended Pacific Lutheran University but Neil finished at Washington State University at Pullman in pharmacy and is in the mission field. He spent eight years in Liberia, Africa, returned home and attended Lutheran Bible Institute, and is now in Nepal. Gene is married, has one boy David, and lives in Michigan.</p>
215, side 1	<p>675: Return trips to Norway. Jens retired in 1968 and returned to Norway the summer of 1969. They flew from Vancouver, BC, to Oslo and then took the Nordlandsbane to Trondheim and then Bodø - a great trip. It was a wonderful three-week visit, after being gone for 46 years. He didn't know most of the people, just his mother and brothers, Peder and Alfred. He walked around the hillsides a lot on that visit and really enjoyed that. They returned in 1973 and stayed longer, although it wasn't quite like the first time. They flew all the way - from Seattle to Copenhagen and Bodø by way of Stavanger and Bergen. The wife has relatives in Norway also so they spent a lot of time visiting - and eating.</p>
215, side 2	<p>092:</p>

Container(s)	Description
	At his wife's home one could look north and see the midnight sun. At Jens' home it was light at 12, but the mountains prevented their seeing the sun directly.
215, side 2	104: More about Jens' family home and childhood. His father bought the place; it has since been torn down and a new house built by Astrid's family (Peder's oldest daughter). The bay is named Solvik, possibly because it is as round as the sun. Jens enjoyed walking in the hillsides because as a boy it was his job daily to find and bring home the cattle, which ranged in the woods on summer days. In winter the cows were kept in a barn due to the snow and ice. There "was some pretty lively business going on - tails up in the air" when the cows were released in the springtime.
215, side 2	191: SPEAKING NORWEGIAN Neil can talk a little, but understands more, as does Gene. Since this interview occurred around Christmas, Jens sings the first verse of "Jeg er så glad...".
215, side 2	215: OTHER MEMORIES OF NORWAY The five families on Solvik were isolated, not seeing anyone else for months. When the kids got older, they took off - traveling at night by the light of the midnight sun.
215, side 2	242: The Norwegian family after Jens left. His mother, 94, was still living in 1969, but died before their second visit. By then, Peder and Annette were dead also. Bjarne had drowned in a riding accident some years before. He hurt his eye at one time and was hospitalized. The infection spread to his second eye, and he became virtually blind. Annette married but had no children - had a problem with miscarriages. Peder had four children. He was already married and had a little girl, Astrid, in 1923 when Jens emigrated. They lived on the home place with his mother. Alfred was a young boy and worked at home; Bjarne wasn't much good because of his eyes. His mother eventually sold the home place to Astrid via the custom known as "kår" - a pension plus room and board paid by the new owner of a farm to the former owner. Jens was told it was a bad deal for his mother because they didn't pay her like they should, and they weren't good to her either.
215, side 2	332: CHRISTMAS They washed the inside of the house all over and put the Christmas tree in the middle of the floor. After evening chores they had supper, lit the candles, and joined hands singing Christmas songs while walking around the tree. Then they opened the wrapped presents of sewn underwear and shirts. There were lots of good eats: baked goods and meat. Everyday food was fish, herring and potatoes; it was nice to have meat with gravy on it.
215, side 2	370: CONFIRMATION

Container(s)	Description
	<p>After grade school (eighth grade) they went to confirmation in the summer. About 75 kids from all over the Fauske district went down to the state church at Fauske. It was too far to return home, so they were housed in people's homes around that town and also Finneid. They learned and memorized church history, Bible history and verses, catechism, and hymns for about one month. On confirmation Sunday, they lined up in church, and the pastor went up and down the line asking questions. Jens thinks first communion was held a different day, either on Monday or the following Sunday.</p>
215, side 2	<p>419: A story in connection with confirmation, or how Jens almost drowned. Peder returned home from "konfirmasjon" on the tugboat. There was no dock at Solvik, so they were waiting to pick him up in a rowboat out in the lake. However, Peder forgot his coat on the Fauske tug, so Jens and Norman rowed back out to meet the boat towing 3-4 barges of copper ore on its return trip. Norman pulled alongside the tug, but no one was there to grab the rope from Jens' hand. "Like a knucklehead" Jens caught hold of the wooden railing on the tug and was pulled into the water. He went under and drank a huge amount of water before coming up only to bump under the rowboat. A confused Norman managed to pull him out by the line, which Jens was still clutching. He's still scared of water and diving, because of that incident.</p>

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas
Church attendance--Norway
Confirmation--Norway
Education--Norway
Emigration and immigration
Family--Norway
Naturalization
Norway--Social conditions--1945-
Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs
Ocean travel

Personal Names :

Solvik, Jens Neil--Interviews
(creator)
Andreason, Annette
Andreason, Bjarne
Hillard, Myrtle
Solvik, (Marvin) Gene
Solvik, Gerald
Andreason, Alfred
Andreason, Bernhard
Andreason, Norman

Andreason, Peder
Wickstrøm, Marie

Family Names :

Andreason family
Hillard family
Solvik family
Wickstrøm family

Geographical Names :

Bellingham (Wash.)
Solvik (Norway)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Miners
Sawmill workers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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