

# Hildur Johansson Larson Oral History Interview, 1979

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Larson, Hildur Johansson
<b>Title</b>	Hildur Johansson Larson Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1979 (inclusive) 1979 1979
<b>Quantity</b>	2 file folders 1 sound cassette 1 compact disc.
<b>Collection Number</b>	t019
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Hildur Johansson Larson , a Swedish 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

Hildur Anna Maria Johansson was born in Edsdaalen, Sweden on February 12, 1896. Hildur was one of five children born to her parents, Johan August Magnusson and Matilda Bryntesdotter. Hildur's father was a farmer, and her mother stayed home and wove. Hildur worked in a hospital in Stockholm for two years and thought about training to become a nurse; however, she was too young to start training. Around 1922, Hildur met her future husband in Norway while she was working with her aunt. After he had attended business school and had not found a job, he left for America. Hildur decided to follow him and left for the United States by herself on September 13, 1927. She departed reluctantly, but happily the two of them were married within 24 hours of her arrival. They lived in Hoquiam, Washington while Hildur's husband worked at the sawmill. In 1930, they had their first child named Judith. When a bad flood hit Hoquiam in 1933, the family moved to Tacoma. Hildur's husband became an American citizen around 1941, but Hildur never wanted to become a citizen. Part of her wanted to return to Scandinavia, but when her children began school, she realized she needed to stay in America. For a long time Hildur delayed learning English; Hildur and her husband mostly spoke Norwegian in their home. The

two of them became editors of the Western Viking in which Hildur published poems in both Swedish and English. She and her husband belonged to the Sons of Norway, and Hildur was a member of the Ladies Aid in the church-Emmanuel Lutheran. Hildur never returned to Sweden, but her son Edgar did. Hildur still decorates and cooks for Christmas in the Swedish tradition. She enjoys writing poetry and has passed that love on to her family members.

### Lineage

Maiden Name: Hildur Anna Maria Johansson. Father: Johan August Magnuson. Mother: Matilda Bryntesdotter. Paternal Grandfather: Magnus Adamson. Paternal Grandmother: Anna Kristina Johansdotter. Maternal Grandfather: Brynte Andersson. Maternal Grandmother: Christina Magnusdotter. Brothers and Sisters: Hedvig Kristina Johansson, Hilmer Mauritz Johansson, Hilda Olivia Johansson, Helga Elisabeth Johansson. Spouse: Ole Elias (Ed) Larson Fjorstad. Children: Judith Larson, Edgar Larson.

## Content Description

This interview was conducted on April 6, 1979 in Tacoma, Washington with Hildur Larson. It contains information on personal background, emigration, marriage, church and community organizations, traditions, and Hildur's poetry. 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 Helen Tengesdal 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	
19, side 1	005/01: FAMILY BACKGROUND Hildur Anna Maria Larson, born February 12, 1896 in Edsdalen, Sweden close to the Norwegian border in the south.
19, side 1	042: Mother's name was Matilda Bryntesdotter and father was Johan August Magnusson. He was a farmer; Mother wasn't so well, and she was in the house and did weaving--fabric for clothes. They raised their own flax for linen. Mother would work with the fibers spinning a linen thread and then weaving cloth, sheets, pillow cases--all that. Hildur still has some of these items.
19, side 1	083: There were five children in the family but one sister died three hours after Mother. Oldest was Hedvig Kristina, then Hilmer Mauritz, Hildur, Hilda Olivia and Helga Elisabeth who died.
19, side 1	109/02: The paternal grandmother lived nearby in a little house and Hilda, the younger sister, stayed with her after school. The youngest sister and brother were with her when she died in 1912 or 1913. These grandparents were farmers. Morfar [the maternal grandfather] was married a second time and had a bigger farm with trees and fruit. They lived a little ways from Hildur but visited often. During one visit when she was 10 years old in 1906, there was an earthquake. They

Container(s)	Description
	could feel the house move. She remembers where she stood and how she hung on. The church, Edskyrka, was cracked by the earthquake.
19, side 1	159: Farfar [paternal grandfather] died long ago; farmor [paternal grandmother] had to raise four young children [two boys and two girls] by herself. "I loved her. She was the best", because she helped raise Hildur's family also. Hildur's father's name was Magnus Johansson, and his father was Johannes Magnusson. By Hildur's time, the girls took the father's last name, Johansson, not Magnusdotter.
19, side 1	199/03: EMIGRATION Hildur emigrated alone in 1927 coming from Stockholm on the Stavangerfjord to New York. She was seasick for most of the trip, but kept a log in Norwegian. "S. S. Stavangerfjord. Utdrag av logbok, Reise Nummer 78. Fra Oslo via Stavanger, Bergen, Halifax til New York, 1927, og skipet gikk den 13. september ankom New York den 22. September". The trip took nine days and six hours.
19, side 1	245: One American citizen on the boat was let off the first day, and the emigrants followed the next day with no problems. The customs people asked the same questions the officials had in Stockholm. Hildur was going to her "mannlig venn" [fiance, boyfriend]. But she couldn't say that; only married women could do that. Whatever she told those officials, she repeated it to the American customs people: "Because they told me there, they won't let me go until he comes and picks me up". Hildur felt that if he didn't pick her up that would be fine; she could always go back to Sweden. Her cabin mate had a room in Brooklyn and Hildur could have stayed there until her boyfriend picked her up. But it wasn't necessary; she just got on the train in New York for Seattle.
19, side 1	290/04: In preparation for the trip Hildur got her passport marked valuables like silver. Unless silver was monogrammed, you had to pay duty on it. There was a traveler's aid on the train who knew Scandinavian and watched out for the girls, "so no one would come kidnap us. Lots of girls there. And some of them were real dumb too; they went out in the city". Hildur was older [31], knew better, and could take care of herself.
19, side 1	328: Hildur wanted to say good-bye to her entire family in Dals Län, her sister in Stockholm and the brother in Fredriksberg. After that, the train continued to Oslo where she boarded the Stavangerfjord. In Oslo, she had two aunts [father's sisters]. She had stayed and taken care of one of the aunts with arthritis for eight and a half years. The other aunt had lived in New York for 19 years before coming home to take care of the arthritic sister. Both were in Oslo

Container(s)	Description
	when Hildur emigrated. She stayed with them a few days. Her boyfriend had sent the ticket.
19, side 1	<p>356/05: MEETING HUSBAND IN NORWAY</p> <p>Hildur met her husband in Oslo when she worked with her aunt. One day in 1922-3, Hildur, her sister, and her friend were eating ice cream, listening to music and having a good time at an outdoor cafe in Oslo. Three fellows wanted to share the table. The girlfriend had gone to school with them, so she introduced the fellows and "assured them there was plenty of room for three more". He was in the last month of business school in Oslo. Then he returned home to Strand looking for work. Not many jobs were available, so he stayed one year with a brother and helped build his house. Came back to Oslo for a two week vacation and stayed at Hildur's aunt's place while he looked for work. Not finding any, he finally went home saying "I'll go to America". Hildur said "Go ahead. But I didn't think he meant it". They continued to correspond, and he left for America from Bergen.</p>
19, side 1	<p>409:</p> <p>She felt sad when she left Oslo. Hildur's sister had come to Oslo to care for the two aunts. So she and the aunt [who lived in America] accompanied her to the boat, said good-bye, and waved. "I waved back, and there I was. I'd been saying good-bye all along from Stockholm, but that was the worst".</p>
19, side 1	<p>422:</p> <p>She didn't stay overnight in New York but got right on the train. The traveler's aid [a man] took Hildur out to a restaurant. After she ate, she had sandwiches made up for herself and some friends on the train and bought some fruit, postcards in Norwegian, and stamps. This was in St. Paul or some place between New York and Seattle. She also sent a telegram to her boyfriend in Hoquiam stating that she'd arrive a certain day, and he was to meet her. She got up early that day, got dressed, and had breakfast. When she looked up and out the window, they were in Seattle and "I saw him walking" with another boy whose brothers were on the same train.</p>
19, side 1	<p>466/06:</p> <p>"When I saw him, I run out of the train, of course. And the porter, he come after me to see what happened". The porter was a tall, Negro man and she hadn't seen black people before. Hildur was wearing a brown suit and lost a button when she hopped off the train, but took time to pick it up before she met him. Then he and the other boy came on board. Marriage in America: The traveler's aid said they had to notify him within 24 hours that they were married. So they continued on the train to Hoquiam. On September 30, 1927, they went to a Swedish pastor [Hilen ?] in Aberdeen, and he performed the ceremony in Swedish, and "I cried". They had their golden wedding two years ago. The pastor's daughter played the organ at the wedding, and they had coffee after with the witnesses. This girl's fiance lived in Stockholm and she was going there to marry him. Settling in: Her husband could speak English. He had lived up in the woods at first, as did most of the Norwegians. These were hard times,</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>and he got work for awhile at the sawmill. In 1930, the first child, Judith was born. They moved to Tacoma on New Year's Eve in 1933. There was a bad flood in Hoquiam; motorboats were in the streets and could tie up to the tops of tents. Someone drove them up here leaving most of the furniture behind. They lived on Ainsworth at first because husband had a cousin across the street. After that they had a little house where Edgar was born in 1935.</p>
19, side 1	<p>551/07: To do the shopping in Tacoma, Hildur pointed. In Hoquiam there were so many Norwegians, Swedes, and Swedish-Finns--something she'd never heard of before. There were all kinds of stores where Swedish was spoken, so she had very little problems there with the language.</p>
19, side 1	<p>564: Her wedding dress was black silk with a pleated white silk front which she brought with her. She didn't bring any heavy clothes, including a good wool coat, because they said she didn't need any. "I about froze the first winter". She bought a big trunk in Oslo, packed it and traveled with it across the world. Still has the trunk.</p>
19, side 1	<p>585: There was so much rain in Hoquiam; she didn't like that nearly as well as Tacoma. Tacoma was a larger city, which was familiar to her and reminded her of Oslo and Stockholm. Swedish friends [Mrs. Atterberg?] from Tacoma visited her in Hoquiam. And Hildur took the bus between Tacoma and Seattle to visit her friends. Once when her husband was out of town, she and the children traveled and stayed in Seattle with a friend.</p>
19, side 1	<p>620/08: Her husband became a citizen around 1941-2. He worked up in the woods until the fall of 1939 until the strike hit. Then he began work in Tacoma. She never became a citizen because she didn't plan to stay. She made plans with a friend to take English at Jason Lee School, but then Edgar came and she didn't have the time. But her friend did. She and her husband were editors of the Western Viking. Hildur wrote some poems for the paper; some in Swedish and some in English.</p>
19, side 1	<p>660: Hildur hadn't learned much about America from her aunt in Oslo, because Hildur was in Stockholm when this aunt was in New York. The aunt had wanted Hildur to come to New York many times and years ago starting when Hildur was 12. Before Hildur went to Oslo, she worked two years in a hospital in Stockholm as she wanted to be a nurse. But she was too young to start training. Then she changed her mind and just worked there [Ebenezer ? Hospital], and loved it. Sister Sofia, the head deaconess, had a nephew in New York. While visiting him, she had been invited to Hildur's aunt's house [Martin and Maria Lauritson ?] in Brooklyn. "The world was small".</p>

Container(s)	Description
19, side 1	709/09: When Judith started school, Hildur decided to stay in the United States. "You find out by and by that things don't go the way you think".
19, side 2	057/10: Hildur and husband spoke Norwegian in the home, so Judith spoke it very well when she began grammar school at Stanley. When they moved, the children attended Jefferson.
19, side 2	095: CHURCH AND ORGANIZATIONS Belonged to the Norwegian Lutheran Church--Emmanuel--on Stevens. Then they moved to 16th and K to a better house and to be closer to the bus and her husband's work at General Hardwood. The children started Sunday School in Our Saviors on G St. Then they transferred to Central Lutheran by Stadium. On their golden anniversary they received a telegram from President Carter and his wife.
19, side 2	162/11: Her husband belonged to the Sons of Norway; she joined too, but didn't go very often because of the children. She belonged to the Ladies Aid in church. She could speak Scandinavian with friends on K St. She didn't want to learn English, so she read mainly books and magazines from Sweden. A magazine salesman came to the house one day, and she explained why she didn't read any English magazines. He replied "How do you expect to learn if you don't try? I got so angry I started to learn--just started to read". She learned by reading children's books and then reading them out loud to her children. She still receives and reads the Svenska Journalen but it takes so long to reach America nowadays.
19, side 2	218: Hildur never returned to Sweden for a visit but her son, Edgar, has. He visited his father's family in Norway. His wife, Betty, has a Swedish background, so they also visited her family in Jamtlands lan. Betty and Hildur speak Swedish to one another and the children.
19, side 2	245/12: TRADITIONS They didn't have nissen in Sweden. "When you got something, you know where you got it from and you said thank you many times". They had a juletre with candles [levande ljus]. The first tree in Hoquiam was decorated with white cotton, tinsel, and candles and there were three silk flags on top--Norwegian, Swedish, and American. Hildur made sylte and rullepoelse herself. But lutefisk was the Christmas Eve meal with risengrynsgrout for dessert. Hildur didn't care for lutefisk, but made it for the others.
19, side 2	322/13: MEDICAL CARE

Container(s)	Description
	The first baby was born at home with a doctor's help. She had a friend stay with her, and another one and her husband were godparents for Judith.
19, side 2	344: HILDUR'S POETRY Hildur has written poetry for many years and for various occasions. Some poems have been published in the Tacoma News Tribune and the Western Viking.
19, side 2	355: The first one is in English and was written on August 19, 1956.
19, side 2	367: The next is in Norwegian and was written in May 1945 in honor of Judith's confirmation.
19, side 2	411/14: A Norwegian poem about autumn was written in October 1937.
19, side 2	438: One about a chestnut tree was published in the TNT on July 23, 1955.
19, side 2	462: "Min far" was written in honor of her father when a friend requested a poem for the newspaper for Father's Day. Hildur's mother died when she was six, so Father and Grandmother raised them until she was eleven years old. Then, her father died.
19, side 2	516/15: Many family members like to write poetry. Hildur finishes the interview by reading another poem in Swedish based on Isaiah 1:8-10.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Christmas  
 Emigration and immigration  
 Family -- Sweden  
 Marriage service  
 Poetry  
 Swedish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Swedish-Americans--Social life and customs  
 White-slave traffic

### Personal Names :

Larson, Edgar  
 Larson, Hildur Johansson--Interviews



(creator)

Magnusson, Johan August

Bryntesdotter, Matilda

Fjorstad, Ole Elias Larson

Johansson, Hildur Anna Maria

Larson, Hildur Anna Maria

Larson, Judith

**Corporate Names :**

Emmanuel Lutheran Church (Tacoma, Wash.)

Our Saviors Lutheran Church (Tacoma, Wash.)

Sons of Norway (U.S.) Norden Lodge No. 2 (Tacoma, Wash.)

Stavangerfjord (Steamship)

Western Viking (Tacoma, Wash.)

**Family Names :**

Adamson family

Andersson family

Johanson family

Larson family

Magnusson family

**Geographical Names :**

Edsdalen (Sweden)

Hoquiam (Wash.)

Oslo (Norway)

Tacoma (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Editors

Sawmill workers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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