

Hilma Kristiina Vanhala Michelson Oral History Interview, 1979

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Michelson, Hilma Kristiina Vanhala
Title	Hilma Kristiina Vanhala Michelson Oral History Interview
Dates	1979 (inclusive) 1979 1979
Quantity	4 file folders 7 photographs 1 sound cassette 1 compact disc
Collection Number	t016
Summary	An oral history interview with Hilma Kristiina Vanhala Michelson, a Finnish 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

Hilma Michelson was born on July 24, 1890 in Hailuoto, Finland, which is a small island off the West Coast of Finland, opposite the city of Oulu. Hilma's parents were Lauri Vanhala and Elenora Klemettila, and Hilma was the youngest of six children. Hilma's father died in a fishing accident when Hilma was three years old and her mother died eight years later, leaving Hilma to live with her aunts. When Hilma was old enough to live on her own, she worked and lived at the Hailuoto parsonage for three years and then worked at another parsonage in Oulu. In 1912, Hilma's brother Henry sent her a ticket to America, where he was living in Astoria, Oregon. Hilma's ticket was for the Titanic, but fortunately for her, she missed its departure. In Astoria, Hilma found work at a local boardinghouse, which is where she met her husband, Willie Michelson. Willie's parents had emigrated from Finland in 1882 and came to Astoria to fish. After they were married, Hilma and Willie moved to a farm in Kelso, Washington and had three children: Viola, Anne, and Carl. Hilma has been active in the Community Congregational Church in Hockinson and the Finnish Brotherhood. She returned to Finland in 1952 to attend the Olympic Games

and visit her relatives. Hilma is very proud of her heritage and stated, "You never have to be ashamed to say you are Finnish."

Lineage

Full Name: Hilma Kristiina Michelson. Maiden Name: Hilma Kristiina Vanhala. Father: Lauri Vanhala. Mother: Elenora Klemettiila. Paternal Grandfather: Jacob Vanhala. Paternal Grandmother: Anna Grelas. Brothers and Sisters: Lauri Vanhala, Juho Herman Vanhala, Sophia Dagmar Vanhala, Susanna Josephina Vanhala, Kalle Hendric Vanhala. Spouse: Willie Michelson. Children: Viola Michelson, Anne Michelson, Carl Michelson, She also had a stillborn child.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Hilma Michelson on February 20, 1979 in Battle Ground, Washington. It contains information on family background, emigration, employment, marriage and family, and Finnish heritage. The interview was conducted in Finnish and the summary sheets were compiled from the paper "Looking Back" by the interviewer, Donna Mallonee.

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

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	
16, side 1	005: NOTE: The taped interview was recorded on February 20, 1979. The following information is taken from the paper "Looking Back" which is based on a series of interviews from January to April 1979. FAMILY BACKGROUND: Hilma Kristiina Vanhala was born on July 24, 1890 on Hailuoto which is an island off the west coast of mid-Finland and opposite the city of Oulo. There is little work available on Hailuoto so most young people leave for Oulu or other areas. Hilma's paternal grandparents were Jacob Vanhala and Anna Greta. One of their children, Hilma's father, was Lauri Vanhala born November 12, 1838. Hilma's mother, Elenora Klemettila, was his second wife. Six children were born to them: Lauri, Juho Herman, Kalle Hendric, Sophia Dagmar, Susanna Josephina, and Hilma Kristiina. Hilma's father died when she was three years old. "He was a fisherman and he died in the winter. They set their fish traps in holes in the ice and used long thin poles to move their nets. He fell in and his traps got left under the ice. My older brother went back and got them out. My father got pneumonia and died." Hilma's mother did housework for other people until she died in 1901. Finland came under Russian domination in 1895, and Hilma's two oldest brothers were conscripted into the army. Lauri was never heard from, and Juho Herman returned to Hailuoto after serving three years. Susanna married and immigrated to America in 1906 with her husband and young baby. Henry (Hendric) immigrated to America in 1907. Hilma attended a grammar school in Finland for six weeks a year for many years. Only the upper class continued with schooling. They attended the Lutheran church on Hailuoto. At Christmas they had a tree and went to church by sleigh. "Everyone put on their best clothes...and the church was so beautiful with candles burning everywhere at 6 am on Christmas morning". When Hilma's mother died, Hilma and Henry stayed with her Aunt Marya at first and then with Briita (mother's sisters). When she was older, Hilma went to live and work at

the Hailuoto parsonage for three years. Then she went to Oulu and worked in a parsonage there. She was very happy in Oulu working and sharing her free time with other girls from Hailuoto. Women were given the right to vote in Finland in 1906, so Hilma voted there before she immigrated to America. In 1912, Hilma's brother Henry sent her a ticket to immigrate 3rd class on a steamship from Hango, Finland to Ontario, Canada. Then she traveled 2nd class on the train to Astoria, OR. The total ticket price was \$97.75. Henry told Hilma that "there were better work places and the living is better here. ...In America it is so warm, the food was so good...and there was so much". She went from Hango to Hull and then Liverpool, England. Her ticket was for the Titanic, but Hilma missed the departure. That was the fateful voyage when the ship "went down after hitting an iceberg on April 14, 1912. The 3rd class was made up mainly of immigrant Finns and all of them were drowned". Hilma's trip over was adventuresome: a man fell from the ship and died on route and she became ill but was allowed to continue on the trip. Her brother Henry met her in Astoria. She stayed awhile with her sister, Susanna Josephina, before going to work. **SETTLING IN AND WORK:** Astoria was called "Finntown" and "The Helsinki of the West". "By 1920 there were almost 4000 (Finnish people) in a town with a total population of 14,027". Many were single men who lived at boarding houses or with families in the Finn section of town called Uniontown. Hilma got a job at Poysky's [Finnish] Boarding House. "It would have been good there, but there were so many men. They would have all hugged me, so I told the Mrs. I was going to leave. I made 20 dollars a month and board and room. There were three of us girls working there and we slept in the same room". **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY:** It was at the boarding house that Hilma met Willie Michelson. His father and mother had emigrated from Finland in 1882 to the Dakota Territory. Later they moved to Astoria to fish. The Michelson's prospered and were well known in the Astoria area, so the wedding which took place at Kelso was well attended. Hilma and Willie had 20 acres near Kelso next to the Michelson place. All three of children (Viola, Anne, and Carl) were born at this home with a doctor coming to the house. Hilma had lots of work to do on the farm. There were cattle, sheep, pigs and chickens to tend, besides caring for the children and doing all the housework. "I am not saying that men don't work hard, because they do, and their work might be heavier. But, when they are doing their work, all the rest is left to the women. There are the cattle to take care of, and in Finland no matter how many cattle there were the women took care of them and fed them and carried the heavy water. Just a few men would help with that. Then there were the children to take care of and all the work in the house. Most men didn't help with the children at all. When the men finish their work it is done, but the women always have more to do". A large corporation, Long-Bell which later became Longview Fiber, bought out the Michelson farm and many neighboring places. Hilma and Willie bought another farm (80 acres) near Hockinson. **FISHING INDUSTRY AROUND ASTORIA:** When Hilma and Willie were first married; he was a fisherman in the Columbia River during the winters. "They used horses for pulling the nets. The nets would be taken out in the water with boats and then would swing in towards the shore. The horses were on the bank and they would pull the nets in to where it was shallow and they could get the fish." Also in use were traps which were huge hoops with nets around. The traps were tied to pilings, and when the fish swam

Container(s)	Description
	<p>in they couldn't get out. Sometimes sea lions would break into the traps and all the fish would get out. The fishermen would shoot the seals to protect the catch. Hilma was active in the Community Congregational Church in Hockinson. Pastors from Portland came to conduct services in Finnish. During the Second World War, Hilma and other Finns were active in the Finnish Brotherhood which sent relief (clothes, food and supplies) to relatives in Finland. RETURN TRIP TO FINLAND: In 1952, Hilma went to Finland to attend the Olympic Games and to visit her relatives. She stayed with her niece in Hailuoto. "Much was new in Hailuoto when I went to visit. ...I recognized it, but I felt like a stranger. I didn't feel like I wanted to go live there again, but the summers are so nice and it is light all the time". "I am glad to be Finnish. It is known that in the main things Finns are the most honest people there are. Not all know or understand this, but it is true. I have always lived with the Finns and wanted to be with them. You never have to be ashamed to say you are Finnish."</p>

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Education -- Finland
 Emigration and immigration
 Family--Finland
 Finnish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific-- Interviews
 Finnish-Americans--Social life and customs
 Ocean travel
 World War, 1939-1945

Personal Names :

Michelson, Carl
 Michelson, Hilma--Interviews
 (creator)
 Michelson, Willie
 Vanhala, Henry
 Klemettila, Elenora
 Michelson, Anne
 Michelson, Viola
 Vanhala, Lauri

Corporate Names :

Conway Congregational Church (Hockinson, Wash.)
 Finnish Brotherhood (Kelso, Wash.)
 Poysky's Boarding House (Astoria, Or.)

Family Names :

Grelas Family
 Klemettila Family
 Michelson Family
 Vanhala Family

Geographical Names :

Astoria (Or.)
 Hailuoto Island (Finland)

Kelso (Wash.)

Oulu (Finland)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Farmers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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