

# Martin Rasmussen Oral History Interview, 1981

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Rasmussen, Martin
<b>Title</b>	Martin Rasmussen Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1981 (inclusive) 1981 1981
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 10 photographs 2 sound cassettes
<b>Collection Number</b>	t098-099
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Martin Rasmussen, a Danish 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.

---

## Biographical Note

Martin Rasmussen was born on February 1, 1896 in Tornum, Denmark to Jeppe Hanson Rasmussen and Lucille Jensen. At the time of his birth, Tornum was a part of Germany but was later returned to Denmark in 1920. Martin had four brothers and one sister, and the family lived on a farm in northern Germany. Martin attended school through the eighth grade, learning both German and Danish. When he was finished with school, he became an apprentice with a machinist for four years and then went on to work in a Hamburg machine shop. By this time, the war had begun, and Martin was called into service. He elected to join the Air Corps and did cleaning jobs on the flying field in Hamburg. After the war, Martin returned to Denmark and entered the Engineering Institute. He attended the institute for three and half years and then obtained a job handling boilers and making cheese machines. In 1923, Martin decided to immigrate to America for lack of adequate jobs in Denmark. From Ellis Island, Martin took the train to Moline, Illinois and spent the next four years working in various machine shops throughout the Midwest. In 1927, Martin's mother fell ill, and Martin returned to Denmark for one year. Upon his return to America, he began building dye casting machines in Newark and Chicago until the Depression set in. At that time, Martin traveled to the West Coast, settling in Tacoma, Washington. In Tacoma, Martin found work at an automotive shop and spent his free time developing his own telescope. He also met his wife and was married in the Danish Church in 1943. They had one son,

Edward, who became an engineer. Martin spent the rest of his working career at a plywood machinery company in Tacoma and also became involved with the Danish Brotherhood and an astronomy club, of which he was a charter member. Martin feels he is more European than Danish but does have a special place for Denmark in his heart.

### Lineage

Full Name: Martin Nielson Rasmussen. Father: Jeppe Hanson Rasmussen. Mother: Lucille Jensen. Paternal Grandfather: Rasmus Hanson. Brothers and Sisters: There were four boys and one girl; Sern Rasmussen, Peter Rasmussen. Spouse: (?) Olson; Children: Edward Rasmussen;

## Content Description

This interview was conducted with Martin Rasmussen on October 8, 1981 at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. It provides information about family background, apprenticeship, service in the military, emigration, employment, marriage and family, and Danish heritage. The interview also includes two photographs of Martin as a soldier in the German Army during WWI, three photographs of Martin and his telescope, five snapshots of Martin at the time of the interview, and an article about Martin from the Pierce County Herald (August 20, 1981).

## 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 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

---

## 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	
98, side 1	004: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Born February 1, 1895 in Tornum, Denmark which was part of Germany at the time of his birth.
98, side 1	010: In 1920 the land was returned to Denmark. He talks about this happening.
98, side 1	016: PARENTS Jeppe Hanson Rasmussen and Lucille Jensen. Father was born in Denmark. Mother born in the same section of Denmark. Martin was the name of the farm.
98, side 1	021: FATHER Immigrated to the northern part of Germany. He had a nice farm.
98, side 1	026: BROTHERS AND SISTERS four brothers and one sister. Oldest brother, Sern inherited the farm in 1913. Sister never married. Three brothers were in the military service between 1914-18 during WWI.
98, side 1	042: Brother Peter Rasmussen was wounded in Poland and died there.
98, side 1	049: Martin had Typhus during the war.
98, side 1	054: AFTER THE WAR

Container(s)	Description
	Went to the Engineering Institute in Copenhagen.
98, side 1	058: CHILDHOOD Went to German schools, very strict. Finished the 8th grade.
98, side 1	064: Went into an apprenticeship in machinery.
98, side 1	069: LANGUAGES Learned German in school. Learned also Danish in school.
98, side 1	073: Confirmed after school. This was in Danish. The area used to be a Danish province before 1864 then there was a war between Germany and Denmark.
98, side 1	083 : CHILDHOOD Worked on the farm. Got cows together before school. Pulled turnips, rutabagas, and potatoes.
98, side 1	097: POTATOES Packing potatoes was a special thing for two weeks in September. The whole family helped. Stored potatoes in the cellar. He describes the storing process.
98, side 1	116: RUTABAGAS He describes the picking and the storing of these.
98, side 1	123: SCHOOL Strict discipline. Teacher used a rod.
98, side 1	127 : Discipline at home strict also.
98, side 1	135: CHILDHOOD ACTIVITIES Went skiing in the meadows. Plenty of snow in the winter. Summer went wading in the creek, played soccer with friends, and went bicycling. Always had to work.
98, side 1	158: FARM Good sized, mixed farming. 18 cows and 6 horses. Rode horses on Sundays.
98, side 1	170: WOMEN Did sewing, weaving (talks about weaving in some detail), and baking. Had a big oven. Baked white and pumpernickel bread, 30 loaves. Baked cakes and cookies first.

Container(s)	Description
98, side 1	201: Pumpernickel bread was laid on the bed when it came out of the oven.
98, side 1	207: BUTCHERING The women did this in the fall. They had hogs and cattle.
98, side 1	216: HOG FARM He talks about his nephew with 1300 hogs in Denmark. They mass produce there.
98, side 1	222: Another farm has 180,000 fryers a years. They send them to Italy and get spaghetti back.
98, side 1	229: GRANDPARENTS They were farmers. Father's parents had a little farm in Denmark. His name was Rasmus Hanson.
98, side 1	249: MOTHER'S PARENTS Martin's mother was descended from a minister who in 1500 was important to the Reformation. He describes the history of his mother's family.
98, side 1	273: This minister died of the plague. Talk of this incident very interesting. 400 people died 1/3 of the people in the town died.
98, side 1	294: MOTHER'S NAME Lucille Jensen.
98, side 1	309: CHRISTMAS Had a tree in the biggest room. Used candlelight. Danced around the tree.
98, side 1	328: CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER Best meal of the year. Pork and "all the things that go with it." Put out grains for the birds.
98, side 1	338: FARMING Didn't have much machinery. Cut hay with a hand machine. Rye was harvested first. 4-5 men used sythes. Women rolled the grain together. Used pieces of straw as string to bind it together.
98, side 1	364: WOMEN'S WORK Helped in the fields a great deal. Did the milking three times a day.
98, side 1	372: MILK

Container(s)	Description
	Took milk to the dairy where it was processed. Milkman picked it up. The skim milk came back to feed the hogs and calves. Made money by selling cream and milk.
98, side 1	390: GRAIN Took grain to the miller. Went to windmill and was ground up to feed to hogs and cattle.
98, side 1	398: HARVESTING MACHINE Cut grains. Went back to tie it. 150 acre farm.
98, side 1	409: FARMING Got fertilizer. More livestock. Got food for the cows in cakes made from soybeans and other herbs, which was made in Mongolia. This helped the cows produce more milk.
98, side 1	426: NEW BARN In 1910, a "fancy building" built with rocks from the fields. They were split and then used.
98, side 1	456: HOUSE The house was connected the barn. Some slept in the barn, easier to care for the animals.
98, side 1	477: CHRISTMAS Gifts.
98, side 1	501: NEW YEARS Before New Years Eve they went to relatives and shot off fireworks in the afternoon. In the evening the adults went from house to house for coffee and cookies until 12 or 1am.
98, side 1	537: THIEVES Problems with neighbors stealing things from the barns, wheelbarrows, etc. Brothers stayed up to guard the barn.
98, side 1	558: In the winter, the grain was worked off the straw. Process described in detail. Used the straw for roofing houses. Some problems with roofs catching fire with lightening.
98, side 1	595: CHURCH Not as a child. Adults went on Christmas day.
98, side 1	609: EATING

Container(s)	Description
	Everyone ate out of a common dish when they were kids. There was a big pan and everyone had a spoon.
98, side 1	622: FOOD Side-pork, potatoes, beans, beets, zucchini were all pickled. Talks about preserving ham.
98, side 1	655: GRAIN Stored above the living quarters. Good insulation. Single pane windows. Flower-pots in windows. Beds built in.
98, side 1	681: Card playing for entertainment, black jack.
98, side 2	001: FOLK STORIES The woman in the graveyard without a head. Many things seen. A graveyard was a place one didn't pass by.
98, side 2	020: CHURCH Men sat on one side, women on the other. Singing, no dancing. Minister spoke in Danish. Mostly Danish people. A few Germans.
98, side 2	032: CHURCH Children went to church during confirmation and met with the pastor at his house. Pastor lived well. Lay people brought food and grain.
98, side 2	047: PASTOR Was from Germany but could speak Danish.
98, side 2	054: CONFIRMATION Learned about the Bible, singing. Girls on one side of the hall, boys on the other.
98, side 2	067: SCHOOLS The pastor was also the head of the school district, Lutheran church.
98, side 2	077: APPRENTICESHIP After school he was an apprentice with a machinist for four years. Lived with the people he worked for.
98, side 2	100: Germans could wear some sort of hat, but an apprentice wasn't allowed to wear this and could be punished if they did.
98, side 2	118:

Container(s)	Description
	War began after his apprenticeship. Stayed home for a while.
98, side 2	126: WORK Got a job in the Hamburg machine shop. Had to make tools couldn't buy them.
98, side 2	139: WORK Several close calls with the machinery, not always safe.
98, side 2	157: WAR Called to war. Could select what he wanted to do. Wanted to be in the Air Corps.
98, side 2	165: Worked on the waterfront in Hamburg making big grooves on bullets.
98, side 2	175: Went out on the flying field in Hamburg. Did cleaning jobs. Didn't have runaways.
98, side 2	191: STORY Big Zeppelin (air balloon) was having difficulty landing. This is described in detail.
98, side 2	214: WENT TO BERLIN Took the train from Hamburg to Berlin. Got a job on the air field in the Southeast part of Berlin. Didn't get any pay for a week so he starved for a week.
98, side 2	237: Brother had died in Poland.
98, side 2	241: SIGHTSEEING IN BERLIN Saw the Egyptian museum and an armament museum. He describes these places.
98, side 2	263: DANISH AND GERMAN CONFLICTS Couldn't sing certain hymns. Big problem with this.
98, side 2	291: Picture of the Kaiser was damaged and the person had to skip the country because this was a serious offense.
98, side 2	309: DRAFTED Heard propaganda on how great war was. Hard to fight in German war because of his sentiment was Danish.



Container(s)	Description
98, side 2	322: ARMY 2 million students in Germany volunteered for the army. They had different feelings when they got to the Russian front line.
98, side 2	334: IMPRESSIONS OF WAR Nothing beautiful about it. "Hell on earth." Moral and other defects created by war.
98, side 2	343: Was in France. Contracted typhus and came back to a German Hospital. Was well taken care of.
98, side 2	256: AFTER WAR Came back to Denmark in 1919. The border was open. The land went back to Denmark from Germany.
98, side 2	368: Entered Engineering Institute. Needed past apprenticeship experience to get in. Practical experience very important.
98, side 2	389: ENGINEERING SCHOOL Did drawings in school of steam engines, etc. 3 1/3 years of school. School was based on German techniques.
98, side 2	408: WORK Got a job in a dairy machine place. Handled boilers. Made cheese machines.
98, side 2	428: USA Went to the US in 1923 at the age of 27 because there were not enough jobs in Denmark. Couldn't use all the technical men in Denmark.
98, side 2	442: Didn't know anybody in the US when he went but knew of a few.
98, side 2	462: TRIP OVER Didn't pay for it. Did dishwashing on the boat.
98, side 2	478: PARENTS FEELINGS WHEN HE LEFT Dad died in 1917. Mother didn't have much say.
98, side 2	496: WORK Got a job in a plow shop in Moline, Illinois.
98, side 2	498: ELLIS ISLAND

Container(s)	Description
	Remembers two guys playing checkers. Waited for a long time.
98, side 2	521: Got on a train. Took a few days to get to Illinois. Got to Chicago.
98, side 2	530: BOAT RIDE OVER Good, in June it wasn't rough.
98, side 2	538: MOLINE, ILLNOIS Worked at a plow shop. Big blacksmith who he helped. Very hot furnaces. Temperature changes made it difficult.
98, side 2	558: SPEAKING ENGLISH He knew a few words. People couldn't understand him.
98, side 2	574: Worked with a sledge hammer all day.
98, side 2	579: STORY Experiences in a Greek restaurant. Hard to explain what he wanted. He pointed at things.
98, side 2	589: DAVENPORT, IOWA Worked at a machine shop. Made castings. Talks about the chimney in town, was an American invention. He describes this detail.
98, side 2	633: President Harding's death is mentioned.
98, side 2	648: CHICAGO Stayed at the YMCA. Worked at a small machine shop. The owner had been a German navy man. He was very strict.
98, side 2	681: JULY 4TH Showed up for work, he didn't realize this was a holiday.
99, side 1	013: LINDBERGH His flying over to France is mentioned.
99, side 1	014: RETURN TO DENMARK Went because his mother was sick. He worked his way over by working under decks. Steam kettles.
99, side 1	030:

Container(s)	Description
	This trip was in 1927. He stayed one year. On way back to the US with stops in London and Paris.
99, side 1	038: Binoculars or "spy-glasses" are described. He really liked these.
99, side 1	046: NEWARK, USA Worked building dye casting machines. English was improving.
99, side 1	054: Stock market went broke. Laid everyone off.
99, side 1	068: NEWARK Ran two machines, made \$10 a night.
99, side 1	073: CHICAGO Made four dye casting machines. Everything collapsed. He still had some money.
99, side 1	081: TELESCOPE He made one because he was interested in finding a way to see the moon and the stars.
99, side 1	090: WYOMING Drove out in an old car and worked in the beet fields. Shoveled beets into trucks. Hard work. Had meat three times a day, always burnt.
99, side 1	106: The owners were Russian-German from around Volga, River, Soviet Union. Used Mexicans and Indians for labor.
99, side 1	121: TACOMA, WASH. Came out west to Tacoma in 1930 during the depression years. Not much steady work. Low wages. Worked on Market Street fixing automobiles and trucks.
99, side 1	141: TELESCOPE Worked on weekends developing it. Came up with a good one.
99, side 1	152: DANISH BROTHERHOOD Joined in 1962. Became secretary to the group. For ten years. He was also the treasurer. His wife joined the sisterhood.
99, side 1	168: MEETINGS Made 100's of sandwiches.

Container(s)	Description
99, side 1	172: WIFE She was the choir director in the Danish Church in Tacoma for twenty-five years. He met her in church.
99, side 1	190: Wife's maiden name was Olson. She had seven brothers in the US and two in Denmark who are farmers.
99, side 1	200: WEDDING In the Danish Church in 1943. Hard to find things to eat because of the rations. About 100 people came.
99, side 1	225: CHILDREN Edward was an engineer. Lost all his hair. Work became a hazard. Could get dust in his lungs. Now on a pension. Wife is a nurse.
99, side 1	265: GRANDCHILDREN Two boys, they live in Silverdale, Oregon. Ambition to get them through college.
99, side 1	278: WORK At a plywood machinery place in Tacoma for 25 years. Used engineering some. He describes this.
99, side 1	313: Made plywood machinery. Describes these machines. Automatic machines. Made presses, panel saws and other machines.
99, side 1	340: Got into the company by showing drawings of some presses to the owners.
99, side 1	353: Interested always in the heavens, stars, etc. A real stargazer. Curious about all this.
99, side 1	363: ASTRONOMY CLUB They are charter members of this. All members experts in electricity, machinery, etc. About twelve members.
99, side 1	379: HOBBIES Plays chess, likes to read about it. Thinks about it all the time.
99, side 1	387: HOBBIES Also enjoys classical music, had lots of records. Likes Mozart, Beethoven, and Grieg.

Container(s)	Description
99, side 1	416: Talks about the origin of man. Religious Beliefs:
99, side 1	423: Billy Graham is all wrong. Deuteronomy can't be believed. Talks about Adam and Eve fables.
99, side 1	449: TRIPS BACK TO DENMARK Changes, not Christian anymore, now only 5%. They have something else, different interpretation.
99, side 1	470: CHANGES All talk one language. Not old dialect anymore. Hard to understand slang.
99, side 1	505: Farms more up-to-date. Mass production. Insemination of cows. He goes into detail about these new ways of farming.
99, side 1	539: Lots of machinery because they can't get help.
99, side 1	544: DANISH HERITAGE He feels more European than Danish. Special liking for Denmark. Great country.
99, side 1	560: They eat too much meat in Denmark side pork, etc.
99, side 1	571: Danish language spoken. Good example of the language.
99, side 1	602: Europe is where one finds beauty and history. The US is ahead in living conditions, technique, and industry. No country like the US.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Christmas

Danes -- Ethnic identity

Danish-Americans--Interviews

Danish-Americans--Northwest,Pacific--Social life and customs

Denmark -- Social conditions - 1945-

Emigration and immigration

Marriage service  
World War, 1939-1940

**Personal Names :**

Jensen, Lucille  
Rasmussen, Edward  
Hanson, Rasmus  
Rasmussen, Jeppe Hanson  
Rasmussen, Martin--Interviews  
(creator)

**Corporate Names :**

Astronomy Club (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Danish Brotherhood in America (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Plywood Machinery Company (Tacoma, Wash.)

**Family Names :**

Hanson family  
Jensen family  
Rasmussen family

**Geographical Names :**

Hamburg (Germany)  
Moline (Ill.)  
Tacoma (Wash.)  
Tornum (Denmark)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Farmers  
Machinists

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
2004