

Peter Laurits Fet Oral History Interview, 1984

Overview of the Collection

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| Creator | Fet, Peter Laurits |
| Title | Peter Laurits Fet Oral History Interview |
| Dates | 1984 (inclusive) 1984 1984 |
| Quantity | 3 file folders 4 photographs 1 sound cassette |
| Collection Number | t264 |
| Summary | An oral history interview with Peter Laurits Fet, 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 | Norwegian |
| Sponsor | Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. |

Biographical Note

Peter Laurits Fet was born on March 10, 1900 in Hellen, Ikornes, Sykkylven, Norway, which is on the West Coast of Norway. His parents were Peter Syverin Fet and Karoline Hellen, and he had one sister, Signe Karoline. When Peter was sixteen years old, he began to fish and remained in the industry for two seasons until deciding to immigrate to America with some friends. Once in America, he worked in the timber industry near the Hoquiam-Aberdeen area in Washington State. Peter stayed in Washington for six or seven years before returning to Norway, where he married Åsta Brudevold and had two children, Kjell and Olaug Gjersrud. Åsta's brother Erling also spent time in America when he was younger. He worked on a farm in Minnesota, then moved to the West Coast, where he lived his whole life. Normal jobs for women immigrating to America was housekeeping and work in the Alaskan fishing industry. Both Peter and Åsta visited America in 1962, where they visited the Yakima area where a cousin lived. Three things she remembers about America are the Grand Coulee Dam, Roosevelt, and the dark green American mountains. Åsta also talks about Norway during the Second World War.

Lineage

Full Name: Peter Laurits Fet. Father: Peter Syverin Fet. Mother: Karoline Hellen. Paternal Grandfather: Lars Peter Guttormsen. Paternal Grandmother: Inger Larsdatter Fet. Maternal Grandfather: Ole Larson Hellen. Maternal Grandmother: Anne Marta Gertmundsdatter Lade. Brothers and Sisters: Signe Karoline Fet, Spouse: Åsta Brudevold. Children: Kjell Fet, Olaug Gjersrud.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Peter Fet on June 16, 1984 in Sykkylven, Norway. It contains information about family background, emigration, work, return to Norway, and marriage. The interview was conducted in Norwegian and was translated by Christer Uthus on June 14, 2001. Also available are photographs of Peter at an immigrant funeral in Tacoma, Washington, Peter beside his automobile, Peter and friends at Christmas in Hoquiam, Washington, and Peter and his wife Åsta at the time of the interview.

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 Janet Rasmussen 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 | |
| 264, side 1 | 011: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Peter Lauritz Fet was born at Hellen at his mother's house on March 10, 1900. Peter grew up at Hellen and moved thereafter to Fet. Not many houses were available in Fet at that time. The families living in Fet have been living there for centuries. |
| 264, side 1 | 039: FAMILY Father's name was Peter Severin. Mother, Karoline Hellen, worked as a midwife and was killed in a bus accident in the area in 1951. His sister, Signe is 20 years younger than Peter. |
| 264, side 1 | 060: CHILDHOOD Six families in the area. Every family owned a farm and each family had several kids, which meant that he had several friends growing up. Remembers quarrels with friends, but they usually became friends quickly again. Peter enjoyed growing up at Fet. |
| 264, side 1 | 076: SCHOOL : Peter lived one kilometer from the school. The class had one teacher, Johan Brunstad. Had this teacher almost all the years and he was a very good teacher. Went to school with kids from three other farms in the area: Fet, Dravlaus and Velle. Peter describes this as the best time of his life. Went to school until confirmation, Peter was then 15 years old. The old system was school every day for two weeks and then two weeks off. The new system was school every second day throughout the whole year. Peter remembered a strike when the school wanted to change between these two systems. A new teacher, Lars Johannes, retired, was there during the strike for a couple of months. This incident happened when Peter was 10 years old. |
| 264, side 1 | 126: WORK IN NORWAY |

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| | <p>Helped his father on the farm when he was not attending school. Started working after confirmation, 15 years old. Worked the first year as a fisherman on a herring boat. Did not get any fish this year. Fishing was seasonal work and happened during the winter. Fishing took place along the shore and there could be 15-20 people working on one boat. The next year he worked in a boathouse, where the boats delivered the herring. There the herring was salted, put in barrels, and sold, mostly to Englishmen. When he was 18 years old, he got a job as an apprentice in a lumber mill. Worked for Johan Ørsta at the Ekornes Company. Worked together with 7 other people. When he was 20 years old, he worked on the roads in the area. Difficult to get a job now, not jobs for everybody. Low wages: 50-60 øre/hour. Many thought about leaving home to get jobs and America was the best alternative.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>195: EMIGRATION</p> <p>The first people from Sykkylven, mostly youths, emigrated to America, starting at the turn of the century. Many in the community got the so-called "America-fever" and several left for America between 1900-1930. Some left even if they owned farms and had family. Some had been there before and already knew the language. People from Sykkylven mostly settled on the West coast. People that had emigrated earlier helped the new emigrants to settle in.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>247: PETER'S JOURNEY</p> <p>Peter emigrated to America in 1923, together with 20 other youths from Sykkylven. Almost 100 persons from Sykkylven emigrated to America in 1923. Not everyone ended up in Hoquiam, some went to Tacoma and some even went to Seattle. Many of them had been there before. Peter did not know a single English word, so sign language helped him in the beginning. Learned the language quickly and he also received help from people already living in the area. Peter arrived in Hoquiam in February 1923. He lived together with a man, Bernh Brunstad, and his family that had been in the area since around 1900.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>276: WORK/LIFE IN AMERICA</p> <p>Peter had done some construction work before and therefore got the job as a house builder together with Brunstad In Aberdeen. They continued to work together for six years. When he worked he got room and board for free. A man named Rikstad from Bergen, Norway helped him get his first job. Peter enjoyed working in the city, but also visited his friends that worked in the forest sometimes. The people working in the forest worked there for several months at a time, without ever visiting the city. Peter, together with Brunstad, helped people when they came to the city and many lived in Brunstad's house. Brunstad had a big house with many bedrooms in the attic. He did not charge rent for at this occasions. People stored their best clothes at Brunstad's and it was Peter's task to get the clothes repaired and cleaned in between visits. Brunstad was married and had several kids. His wife made food for everyone and the whole family was very generous. Peter usually ate at Brunstad's and he therefore ate mostly Norwegian food. Peter traveled together with Brunstad by car in the weekends and he met many people since Brunstad had many friends. Many immigrants bought a car after a while, but Peter never owned a</p> |

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| | <p>car in America. Peter started as an apprentice and had to join a union. The job paid a good salary after a while. Peter and Brunstad helped build a house for Arnar and Alec Poulsen. This house was donated to the city and are used as a forestry museum today.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>383: NORWEGIAN SOCIETIES</p> <p>Peter was a member of Sons of Norway, "Gangerolv" No. 14. Activities in this society: Youth work, Norwegian work, programs and meetings. Sons of Norway also arranged a party on July 4 and at Christmas time, when all of the people working in the forest came to the city. They did not have their own hall, they rented a hall from the Swedish called "Eastside Hall" for their meetings. Peter was treasurer for Sons of Norway the last two years he was in America. His main task was then to collect the membership fees from the members. The membership fee was around \$20, which was paid twice a year. Some Norwegian women emigrated to America, but only a few came from Sykkylven. He still has contact with friends in America. Met many new friends, and it was easy to get in touch with other immigrants. Many have moved or died, only one friend, Pete Olsen, is still living in the area.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>455: TICKET TO AMERICA</p> <p>Relatives living in Sykkylven borrowed for Peter NOK 1,200 for the ticket, which was the price of the ticket. Money he saved while working in Norway also helped him on the journey to America. It took Peter one year to save enough money to pay back the price of the ticket. He saved some money, but it was difficult to save money while living in the city. He never bought property in America.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>474: WORK AT A WHALE STATION</p> <p>While working for Rikstad in Aberdeen he got a job at a whale station in Vestbo outside Aberdeen. He repaired some large containers, in which they cooked whale fat. He worked there in the summer and because of the heat the smell was very bad in the area. Peter describes this as the worst job he ever had.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>491: ENGLISH LANGUAGE</p> <p>Peter took some English courses, tried to read articles in the newspaper, and listened to people talk to each other. He also got much help from the people that had lived in the area for several years.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>502: WORK IN THE FOREST</p> <p>The forest in the area around Hoquiam was mostly virgin forest, which made the work difficult. Several accidents happened in the forest. Mostly manual labor in the beginning, which made the job dangerous. People at the hospital almost all the time. Most common injury was broken bones and legs. Peter and a friend, Peter Hole, used to visited people in the hospital and got many friends during these visits. The work in the hospital got more mechanical after a while, which limited the danger for the workers.</p> |

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| 264, side 1 | <p>525: FAMILY REACTIONS</p> <p>Parents could not say much, it was his decision. He told his parents that he would stay there for some years and then return. This was the plan for most of the people going to America. Peter was the only son, but going to America was the only possibility to earn money. He was definitely returning to Fet to take over the family farm, however, many of his friends never returned to Norway. Was never in doubt, because he could claim the family farm because it was a freehold farm. The main factor for many for returning to Norway were the rights to freehold farms.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>552: DIFFERENCES AMERICA/NORWAY</p> <p>Peter was in America for 6 1/2 years. He encountered several differences when he returned but enjoyed returning to Norway. He started building houses when he returned to Norway, built a hay barn the first year. Built a new house on the family farm afterwards. His son is running the farm now. Many tasks and he was busy all the time after returning.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>579: NORWEGIAN NEWSPAPER</p> <p>He did not subscribe to any Norwegian newspapers while staying in America. He read "The Western Viking" while living in America. This newspaper, together with letters from home, enabled him to be updated on events back home.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>586: CONTACT WITH AMERICA AFTER RETURN</p> <p>Kept in touch with friends via letters after returning to Norway. Many have died now, but Pete Olsen and Marie Blindheim is still alive. Marie is a friend still living in America. She has many kids. Her husband died while floating timber. Peter also visited America in 1962 together with his wife Åsta, when the World Fair was in Seattle.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>604: U.S. CITIZENSHIP</p> <p>Peter was a U.S. citizen. He got the "first" papers, and could also have gotten the "second", but he never got around to take them.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>608: IDEAS BROUGHT HOME</p> <p>He brought some construction ideas home, especially regarding kitchen furnishings. He built the kitchen furnishing in the house in Norway himself, and the new idea was to make room for the feet below the kitchen counter, which was not normal in Norway at that time. He also got the idea of cupboards. The normal feature in Norway at that time was just ordinary shelves with maybe a curtain in front.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>648: FOOD</p> <p>Used mostly the same food in America as in Norway, except that there were more fruit in America at that time.</p> |

| Container(s) | Description |
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| 264, side 1 | <p>656: MARRIAGE</p> <p>Married in 1934, on June 2. Married with: Åsta Brudevold. Two kids: One boy and one girl. Boy: Kjell Petter. Full-time job as an architect, but he is also running the farm. Girl: Olaug, married to Odd Gjersrud, from Oslo. Running an auto repair shop in Straumgjerde. Odd was also in America for 16 years.</p> |
| 264, side 1 | <p>676: COMPARISON NORWAY/AMERICA</p> <p>Difficult to compare. Life in Norway has been good the last years as well, but he feels that people were more satisfied before. The biggest change came with the introduction of TV and radio, people talked more to each other before they arrived.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>035: PICKPOCKETS</p> <p>Many pickpockets were in the area when Peter was in America. They could exploit a newcomer, especially on a crowded bus. Several friends lost their money for example on the way to Seattle.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>070: ROALD AMUNDSEN</p> <p>Roald Amundsen visited Seattle after his journey over the North Pole and Peter was in Seattle when that happened. The airship passed Grace Harbor and anchored up by Tacoma. Peter drove past, there were some celebrations in that area, and also some celebrations in "Norway Hall" in Seattle. This was a big happening for the Norwegian immigrants in this area.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>113: CHURCH</p> <p>Went to the Methodist Church in Aberdeen. The church did not have a Norwegian priest while Peter was there. The priest was Danish, and he was called Christensen.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>130: POPULATION IN HOQUIAM</p> <p>Mostly Scandinavian people and they were mostly Swedish and Swedish-speaking Finns. Peter also worked together with them. Worked together with a Finn on the previously mentioned whale station. It was this Finn that helped him to get this job. His name was Österberg and he was a very good carpenter. House construction was a bit different in America, but was quite easy to learn.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>175: UNION/WORK</p> <p>There was one union in every city. The union was only for people working with construction, not for people working in the forest. Peter did not encounter any strikes. Had to leave work the same day if work was not completed in a satisfactory manner. Very high work tempo in the beginning, no time to chat with the other workers. Almost ran in-between assignments. This improved later when Peter started to know people. The workday was 8 hours and overtime was possible if needed. Worked the whole year, only had a couple of days off around July 4 and Christmas.</p> |

| Container(s) | Description |
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| 264, side 2 | <p>208: TRAVELS</p> <p>Visited an uncle in San Francisco once, which also was in the construction business. Did not travel much besides that.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>229: RETURN TO NORWAY</p> <p>Most of the people owning farms and that had family in Norway returned. Peter returned because of the farm and because he had promised his parents to do so. People living in America got home-sick and the home-sickness increased as the years passed. Some returned after they retired in America, but it was hard for them to come back after several years, because they felt like strangers in their home town.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>INTERVIEW WITH ÅSTA FET, PETER'S WIFE</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>287: FAMILY</p> <p>Åsta had three brothers, Johan, Harald, and Erling. All of them emigrated to America, Johan and Harald in 1925 and Erling in 1927. Erling was only 17 years old when he emigrated to America and he ended up working on his aunt's big farm in Minnesota. The aunts name was Louise Revstad. This work was too hard for Erling and he moved to the west coast after some years. He married Borghild Leikanger and is still living in America. He worked some years for a dairy, and ran his own barber shop until retirement. Johan liked fishing best and he also stayed in America his whole life. Harald took over the farm in Norway and ran that until he died in 1975.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>332: TRIP IN 1962</p> <p>The best memory Åsta has. She finally got to see the area from which she had heard many stories and she met many of her husband's friends.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>342: SYKKYLVEN</p> <p>Industry arrived in Sykkylven after Erling left, which improved living conditions in Sykkylven a lot. The emigration to America almost stopped after the industry arrived. Some women left for America and almost all of them never returned to Norway, because they married in America. There were mostly women left in Sykkylven for some years when emigration was on its highest.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>356: JOBS FOR WOMEN</p> <p>Many women worked for the fishing industry in Alaska, on can factories. Several of the women that left for America also did housework for rich families. The immigrants were well-known for doing good work, so it was easy for the women to get a job.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>365: ÅSTA IN NORWAY</p> <p>Åsta also wanted to go to America, but she had to help her parents on the farm, since she was the only child left. They managed to run the farm together, but also got help from younger boys that they payed to help them.</p> |

| Container(s) | Description |
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| 264, side 2 | <p>374: ÅSTA'S TRIP TO AMERICA</p> <p>As previously mentioned, Peter and Åsta visited America in 1962. America was much bigger and better than she thought before she got there, it is impossible to imagine how it is. She remember a trip to Eastern Washington and Grand Coulee Dam. They also visited Roosevelt, WA where they saw a statue of President Roosevelt. She also remembers the big mountains with the dark-red rock. They also visited relatives in Yakima and were able to see the apple gardens in Yakima. They also saw the Leiv Eriksson monument and a big Norwegian ship that passed by that statue. They went to a concert on the world fair, with a Norwegian choir from Utah. They also sang Norwegian songs, including "Vår Gud han er så fast en borg." She started to pick up some English words at the end of the trip, but she wished she had learned English before she went.</p> |
| 264, side 2 | <p>434: WORLD WAR II AND YEARS AFTER</p> <p>After the war was over they received many packages from America, not just from relatives but also through the Marshall treaty. Her brother also knew people in Sweden so they also received help from them. Åsta remembers receiving letters from Sweden during the war. They had been opened by the Germans, and had several censor stamps on them. It was a sad time during the war years, and she is glad that those years are over.</p> |

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Education--Norway
 Emigration and immigration
 Family--Norway
 Fishing
 Naturalization
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs
 Return migration--Norway
 Whaling
 World War, 1939-1945

Personal Names :

Fet, Peter Laurits--Interviews
 (creator)
 Fet, Signe Karoline
 Brudevold, Åsta
 Fet, Kjell
 Fet, Olaus Gjersrud
 Fet, Peter Syverin
 Hellen, Karoline

Corporate Names :

Sons of Norway.(U.S.) Gangerolvo Lodge No.14.(Hoquiam, Wash.)

Family Names :

Brudevold family

Fet family

Guttomsen family

Hellen family

Lade family

Geographical Names :

Aberdeen (Wash.)

Alaska

Hoquiam (Wash.)

Minnesota

Sykkylven (Norway)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Farmers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004