

Odlaug Hasløy Rygmyr Oral History Interview, 1978

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Rygmyr, Odlaug Hasløy
Title	Odlaug Hasløy Rygmyr Oral History Interview
Dates	1978 (inclusive) 1978 1978
Quantity	2 file folders 1 sound cassette 2 compact discs
Collection Number	t002
Summary	An oral history interview with Odlaug Hasløy Rygmyr, 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

Odlaug Rygmyr was born in 1932 in Norway. She grew up in Kristiansund, Møre og Romsdal, Norway with her family and was one of four children. Odlaug attended school until the seventh grade, but her family did not have enough money for higher education, so she began working on farms at the age of fifteen. During the beginning of WWII, Odlaug was working in the fish industry in Nord Norge during the winter months, but moved to Romsdalen, Norway in 1942, where she worked at a hotel/farm until the Germans took it over. She then found a job at a small farm, but the Germans did not think she was needed there and sent her to a larger farm where she was forced to do a lot of work. After six months of working there, the lady on the smaller farm managed to have Odlaug work for her again. After the war, Odlaug moved to Oslo and began working at the British Embassy, which helped her become better acquainted with the English language. In 1948, she decided to immigrate to Seattle, where she had an aunt and uncle, and obtained several jobs working as a housemaid. After five years, she was hired by Boeing and worked there until her first child was due. Odlaug had married a man named Chester, and they had a son and a daughter. She did not go back to work until her children were finished with school,

at which time she began working at a bakery. Odlaug strongly believed in maintaining one's cultural ties, and she and Chester were active members in the Sons of Norway. They were also active in Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Stanwood, Washington, participating in the Sunday school program, Altar Guild, and Women's Circle. Odlaug does not regret coming to America, but does wish she had taught her children more of the Norwegian language.

Lineage

Full Name: Odlaug Rygmyr. Maiden Name: Odlaug Hasløy. Spouse: Chester Rygmyr.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Odlaug Rygmyr on April 6, 1978 in Seattle, WA. It contains information on family background, work, the German occupation of Norway during World War II, emigration, Norwegian heritage, and community activities. The interview was conducted in English with some Norwegian towards the end 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 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	
2, side 1	002/17: FAMILY BACKGROUND Odlag states in Norwegian that she is from Kristiansund, Møre og Romsdal, Norway. She came to America in 1948 as a single woman of 26. Her husband's name is Chester. He is a painter. They have two children, a boy who is in the Marine Corps, and a girl who will be attending the University of Washington in the fall of 1978.
2, side 1	038: WORK Odlag works a few hours a day at the Scandia Bakery. Before she came to America, she worked on farms in Norway during the war.
2, side 1	050: GERMAN OCCUPATION After she had finished school she worked for a farmer for awhile, and then she worked for her mother's cousin who was an invalid. This is where she was working when the war broke out in 1940; she was 18.
2, side 1	095/18: Odlag was in Nord Norge working in the fish industry for six months during the war. In 1942 she left and went to Romsdalen, Norway and worked at a hotel/farm for a few months, but the Germans made a law stating that people could not leave their communities. The Germans also took over the hotel/farm at which she worked. She managed to get another job at a smaller farm which was owned by a family that Odlag really liked, but the Nazis didn't think that this smaller farm needed her so they sent her to a bigger farm where she had to do a lot of work. She was forced to take this job. Odlag worked at this farm for six months, and then, when the lady on the smaller farm became ill she

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	somehow managed for Odlaug to return. She worked at this farm until the end of the war.
2, side 1	<p>143: PARENTS DURING THE WAR</p> <p>The hardest part of the war was the strict rationing. Odlaug's father was a fisherman. When he got older he worked at processing the fish. This was at Hasløy (south of Kristiansund) which is also Odlaug's maiden name. Odlaug's grandfather died when she was quite young, and she doesn't know anything about her grandparents on her father's side. Odlaug remembers her maternal grandmother very well; she lived to be 96. Her maternal grandfather passed away when she was 10-11. Odlaug has her parents, two brothers, and a sister in Norway.</p>
2, side 1	<p>174: EMIGRATION</p> <p>Odlaug's aunt and uncle, who lived in Seattle came to Norway to visit in 1947. Odlaug decided that she wanted to go back with them. They were leaving Norway in February of 1948, but Odlaug's papers were not completed so she had to wait a little while longer. Odlaug arrived in Seattle on July 31, 1948. She had a job five days later working in the Highlands (north of Seattle) as a housemaid for a family named Garret. She got another job at the Fru----? who were a Norwegian family. Then another job in Broadmoor. After she had been in Seattle for five years she got a job at Boeing. She worked there until her first baby was due, and she did not start working again until recently, when her children were through with school.</p>
2, side 1	<p>211/19: BROTHER AND SISTER</p> <p>Odlaug's brothers and sister have come to visit Odlaug, and she has also been back to Norway. The first time was in 1951, when her father was ill. She didn't go back until 17 years later (Christmas 1968), and then she brought her husband and children along. Visited a third time in 1976. Her brothers and sister have no real desire to live in the US, though they will probably visit again.</p>
2, side 1	<p>237: LEARNING ENGLISH</p> <p>After the war was over, Odlaug went to Oslo in 1946 and got a job working in the British Embassy. She worked there from '46 to '48 as a housemaid. There were more English speakers there than Norwegian speakers, so she began to pick up the language.</p>
2, side 1	<p>255: REASONS FOR LEAVING NORWAY</p> <p>Odlaug came over just because she wanted to. She had a real urge to travel.</p>
2, side 1	<p>261/20: TRIP OVER</p> <p>She came over in 1948 by boat traveling with three other ladies who were acquainted with Odlaug's aunt and uncle. They stayed in New York for awhile after they arrived and visited Coney Island, etc. They spent 10 days on the boat coming over. The boat fare was fairly cheap as compared with now.</p>

Container(s)	Description
2, side 1	<p>303: They arrived in New York on a Sunday night, so they didn't go ashore until the next day. That night they were all impressed by the beautiful skyline. Once they got into the city itself, they were no longer impressed. They took a train across the States to end up in Seattle. The train ride took a couple of days. The boat trip was modern: entertainment, etc.</p>
2, side 1	<p>340/21: SETTLING IN Adjusting to American life was a little difficult. Odlaug was very homesick; she missed her family and friends a great deal. Everything - the food and all - was very different here. She was with some Scandinavians here in Seattle so she did get some Scandinavian food occasionally. Odlaug was homesick for the first year; she lost weight. Then she made new friends and got used to the different surroundings. Odlaug kept strong ties with her relatives in Norway. She was so impressed with all the things that she could get here that she sent packages of food, coffee, clothes, etc. to Norway twice a year: Easter and Christmas. These things were very hard to come by in Norway during and after the war.</p>
2, side 1	<p>390: CITIZENSHIP Odlaug became a citizen in 1954. She went to evening classes at Broadway Edison. Tells about actual citizenship process.</p>
2, side 1	<p>414/22: NORWEGIAN HERITAGE She definitely believes that we should keep our cultural ties. Odlaug and her husband are both members of the Sons of Norway. Even though she is an American citizen now, she still has a great deal of loyalty to Norway. She believes that there is room in a heart for both. Odlaug and her family have never really kept up on celebrating the holidays in a Norwegian fashion. Odlaug speaks of how holidays are different here than in Norway, especially Easter which is longer there. She kept up on her baking until recently. Job prevents her from having big festivities on holidays.</p>
2, side 1	<p>494/1: CHRISTMAS In Norway the tree went up and was decorated on Christmas Eve. When she was first in Seattle she couldn't believe that Christmas stuff started appearing in the middle of December. One Christmas Odlaug was in California and people were walking around in shorts. Without snow, it didn't seem like Christmas.</p>
2, side 1	<p>541/2: Odlaug's family didn't have much money when she was growing up, but they always had new clothes at Christmas, even during the Depression.</p>
2, side 1	<p>549: ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS Odlaug and her husband have been very active members of the Sons of Norway. Odlaug was an officer for a few years. They used to have a lutefisk dinner once a year as a fund raiser for scholarships, community aid, and</p>

Container(s)	Description
	remodeling the hall. It turned out to be a lot of work for the women; served lefse, meatballs, etc.
2, side 1	584: CHURCH They are active members of the Lutheran church here and back in Norway. Confirmation is a big deal in Norway. You have the godparents and family over for dinner. Odlaug did the same for her children.
2, side 1	605/3: FAMILY LIFE IN NORWAY When Odlaug lived there, the woman's place was in the home. Some worked in the fish industry on the islands, but primarily the rural women stayed at home. Odlaug isn't sure about in the bigger cities; she lived in a smaller community. It wasn't so important for a woman to get a good education.
2, side 1	633: The excellent medical care policy being used today was started while Odlaug still lived Norway; better than in America. Childbirth care is good now. Before it was not great; there were midwives and that was about it. Now they have clinics where the woman stays one week prior to having a baby in the hospital. Her sister was born when Odlaug was nine; the neighbor ladies helped until the midwife arrived.
2, side 1	665: There wasn't a lot of remarriage after someone was widowed. Now that has changed as well as the attitude towards divorce.
2, side 1	670/4: CRAFTS Odlaug knitted a lot. Her mother spun their yarn and Odlaug helped with that also. She doesn't do as much of that stuff as she used to. She doesn't think that she utilizes her time as well as she used to. Even now in Norway, they sit in front of the TV and they are always doing something with their hands.
2, side 1	700/5: Teenagers in Norway and America are similar - typical - a different way of life. Odlaug never thought of sharing her folktales and stories that she was told as a child to her own children. She says she truly believed those stories were real when she was a child.
2, side 1	721: "BARNEFEST" They celebrated barnefest the second day of Christmas; the julenissen gave the children packages of fruit and nuts. The big presents were given by the parents. On Christmas Eve no one went anywhere. Everyone stayed at home on Christmas Day also; it was family time. On the second day of Christmas, the visiting began - starting with Barnefest.
2, side 1	744/6: SCHOOL IN NORWAY

Container(s)	Description
	Odlaug finished the seventh grade in Norway. That was as high as she could go.
2, side 2	033/7: In Odlaug's family they didn't even discuss higher education because the kids knew that the family couldn't afford it. So they all went out and got jobs fairly early on. Odlaug started taking jobs on farms at 15. She liked farming. After the war she worked at other jobs. For her kids, she feels a higher education is important. Her son was undecided so Odlaug is glad that he went into the service. Her daughter is going to college. It's important for both sexes to have training, college or vocational.
2, side 2	128: Odlaug was also involved with the Camp Fire Girls and the Boy Scouts when her children were growing up. They have always been active in Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Stanwood with the Sunday School program, Altar Guild, and Women's Circles.
2, side 2	155: Odlaug really likes living in Stanwood. The people are making all sorts of efforts to improve it.
2, side 2	196: She doesn't follow politics here. They are too confusing. She doesn't understand the reasoning behind many of our government's actions, so she has decided to stay out of it. She really likes the idea of socialized medicine despite the high taxes involved.
2, side 2	244/8: REGRETS LEAVING NORWAY Odlaug is not at all sorry that she left Norway for America; there were many opportunities for a young person here.
2, side 2	271: DISCIPLINE She feels that it is up to each family. But she does believe that people are too easy on their children, herself included. At school in Norway, Odlaug had a great respect for her teacher; she was scared stiff of him. She knows that respect for a teacher is not the same now.
2, side 2	301/9: NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE USAGE When Odlaug's children were little, she taught them the Lord's Prayer, but she is sure that they don't remember it anymore. Regrets not having taught the children more of the language.
2, side 2	328: WOMEN'S ROLE Odlaug grew up believing that a woman's job was to serve her husband and children. She is old fashioned due to the way she was brought up. She did the same job as men did when she worked on the farms during the war. Now she

Container(s)	Description
	has no desire to re-enter the working man's world. She did not get paid the same as the men did, and she found this to be unfair. Odlaug does believe in equal pay for equal work.
2, side 2	386/10: Odlaug says a table prayer in Norwegian.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Emigration and immigration
 Family--Norway
 Naturalization
 Norway--History--German occupation, 1940-1945
 Norway--Social conditions--1945-
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs

Personal Names :

Rygmyr, Chester
 Rygmyr, Odlaug--Interviews
 (creator)

Corporate Names :

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church (Stanwood, Wash.)
 Skandia Bakery (Seattle, Wash.)
 Sons of Norway (U.S.) Fritjov Lodge No.17 (Stanwood, Wash.)

Family Names :

Hasløy family
 Rygmyr family

Geographical Names :

Kristiansund(Norway)
 Oslo (Norway)
 Romsdal(Norway)
 Seattle (Wash.)
 Stanwood (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Bakers and bakeries
 Domestic

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 2004