Biographical Note

Harold Beck was born Harold Jarle Bech on June 25, 1910 in Bjerka, Norway. His parents were Jens Martin Bech, a tanner and farmer, and Kristine Jonette Skjefstad, a dressmaker. Harold was the sixth of seven children, which included Øyvind, Ottar, Gunnar, Asmund, Solveig, and Ruth. Harold’s brother Gunnar originally had the idea to immigrate to America, but when their uncle, Peter Strand, sent a ticket; Harold was the one who went in April 1929. Peter was a fisherman in Tofte, Minnesota. In Minnesota, Harold worked in various towns as a hired hand and store clerk. He then moved to Wisconsin, where he again worked as a store clerk, worked in a factory, and owned his own grocery store. He was also active at the church in Muskego, Wisconsin, singing in the choir and teaching Sunday school. During WWII, Harold was drafted and joined the Navy. He had his training at the Bremerton shipyards, but was stationed in southern California during the war. In 1941, he married Ruth Hildegarde Kjendalen, a teacher. Ruth and Harold had two sons: John Harold and Paul Phillip, both of whom attended PLU and speak Norwegian. The family settled in the Pacific Northwest, where Harold got involved with the fishing industry. Due to the restrictions it imposed on his family life, he later gave up fishing and went into construction work in Marysville, Washington. There, Harold became involved with the Bethlehem Lutheran Church and worked with the Sunday School as well as being the
president of Marysville PTA, a member of the Sons of Norway, and participating in the Everett Male Chorus. When he retired, Ruth and Harold moved to Tacoma, where he served as the vice-president of Nordlandslaget. Through the years, Harold kept in touch with his relatives in Norway and continued to celebrate the 17th of May.

Lineage


Content Description

This interview was conducted with Harold Beck on March 9, 1981 in Tacoma, Washington. It contains information on family background, emigration, work experiences, marriage, church, and community organizations. 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 Unknown 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


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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassette</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 46, side 1   | 004/09: PERSONAL BACKGROUND  
Born June 25, 1910 in Bjerka, Norway, which is near Mo I Rana. |
| 46, side 1   | 017: PARENTS  
Kristine Jonette Skjefstad. Jens Martin Bech, tanner and farmer. He met his wife in Bodo she was a dressmaker. |
| 46, side 1   | 034: BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
Five (see lineage). The home farm is still in the family. |
| 46, side 1   | 049/10: TANNERY BUSINESS  
How it worked. Later phased out. |
| 46, side 1   | 061: FARMING  
Sold cattle and grain. Also did some logging. |
| 46, side 1   | 074: FJORDS  
Froze in the winter. Good skating. |
| 46, side 1   | 082: FATHER’S EMPLOYMENT  
County work. Chairman of the County Relief Society. He talks about socialized medicine in those days. |
| 46, side 1   | 100: GRANDPARENTS |

Harold Jarle Beck Oral History Interview, 1981  
[Link to the collection](http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv78662)
<table>
<thead>
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</table>
| 46, side 1 | **117: HISTORY ON FAMILY NAME**  
He changed his name on his citizenship papers. |
| 46, side 1 | **156/11: ARRIVED U.S. CA. APRIL 1929**  
Knew no words of English. Train trip to Duluth, Minnesota. Met by uncle, Peter Strand who was a fisherman in Tofte, Minnesota. |
| 46, side 1 | **177: EMPLOYMENT FARM WORK**  
Only work available if you wanted to immigrate. |
| 46, side 1 | **184: REASONS FOR LEAVING NORWAY**  
Times dreadfully bad. Talks about boat building in the area. Uncle loaned him the money, three years to pay it back. |
| 46, side 1 | **207: FEELINGS ABOUT LEAVING NORWAY**  
Not real good. |
| 46, side 1 | **215:**  
Brother, Gunnar talked about wanting to come to U.S. His uncle sent the ticket and Harold came instead. |
| 46, side 1 | **238/12: BOAT TRIP**  
| 46, side 1 | **298:**  
What he brought with him to the U.S., his trunk. |
| 46, side 1 | **314/13: IMPRESSIONS OF NEW YORK**  
Went directly to the train. |
| 46, side 1 | **326: IMPRESSIONS OF NEW YORK**  
Went directly to the train. |
| 46, side 1 | **353: ON TO MUSKEGO, WISCONSIN**  
Home of the first Norwegian Church. He milked cows, but times got too bad and he was let go. |
| 46, side 1 | **384: GOING INTO ICE BUSINESS**  
Bought a truck. Made $18 a month as a store clerk in the Township of Norway in a town called Northscape. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
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</table>
| 46, side 1   | 399: LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES  
Absolutely lost. Learned from a 14 year old. Part time at high school. (See counter II-103) |
| 46, side 1   | 448: NORMANNA MALE CHORUS  
Long time member. |
| 46, side 1   | 454:  
Worried about getting citizenship, 1936. |
| 46, side 1   | 468/02: MEETING WIFE  
Met eight years prior. She did housework. She was from Iola, Wisconsin. She went to Stephens Point College and became a teacher. |
| 46, side 1   | 478: EMPLOYED AT VARIOUS JOBS  
Store clerking, factory in Burlington, Wisconsin got laid off and owned a grocery store. |
| 46, side 1   | 529: DRAFTED  
Went into the Navy. Later settled in the Pacific Northwest. Married in 1941, had his training at the Bremerton Shipyard. He was in Southern California during the war. |
| 46, side 1   | 592/03: EMPLOYED  
Safeway and salmon fishing. |
| 46, side 1   | 600: BACK TO NORWAY  
Mother died. (See counter I-478, II-394) |
| 46, side 1   | 618:  
Gave up fishing as employment, no family life. |
| 46, side 2   | 307/04: COMMUNITY LIFE IN WISCONSIN  
Story behind the first Muskego church founded in 1843. Sang in the choir. Taught Sunday school. Talks about the different synods and Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. |
| 46, side 2   | 103: WORKED HARD LEARNING ENGLISH  
Always felt free to ask (see counter I-399). |
| 46, side 2   | 127/05:  
Attraction to the Pacific Northwest area. Talks about fishing and the life. |
| 46, side 2   | 142:  
| Harold Jarle Beck Oral History Interview, 1981  
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv78662
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46, side 2</td>
<td>Settled in the Seattle area later on to Marysville. (see counter II-217)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 46, side 2  | 149: CHILDREN'S NAMES  
|            | (see lineage) Both attended Pacific Lutheran University. John Harold has published some things. Paul Phillip works for Tower Records. |
| 46, side 2  | 171: HOW HE HEARD ABOUT PLU  
|            | from the Choir of the West. |
| 46, side 2  | 183: EMPLOYED BOATWORKS  
|            | Building boats. Later fiberglass came. |
| 46, side 2  | 217/06:  
|            | Went into construction. Why he moved to Marysville. Active in Bethlehem Lutheran Church (see counter II-142). Worked with the Sunday school. |
| 46, side 2  | 261: CONSTRUCTION WORK  
|            | Had to give it up because of health reasons, angina pectoris. |
| 46, side 2  | 279: BOUGHT LAUNDROMAT  
|            | Bum Deal. Presently retired. |
| 46, side 2  | 296:  
|            | Wife, Ruth taught school on the Indian Reservation. He was employed as a teacher's aide. |
| 46, side 2  | 311/07:  
|            | Former president of Marysville PTA. Member of Sons of Norway and Everett Male Chorus. Presently, vice-president of Nordlandslaget. |
| 46, side 2  | 394/08: SEVERAL TRIPS TO NORWAY  
|            | Norway has changed a lot. Talks about the saeter and changes in the Church. (See also counters I-478 and I-600). |
| 46, side 2  | 447:  
|            | Keeping in touch with Norwegian relatives. |
| 46, side 2  | 488/09: IMPORTANCE OF NORWEGIAN HERITAGE  
|            | Hard to measure. Recites Norwegian poem. |
| 46, side 2  | 505: UNION STORY  
|            | Wagner Act. |
| 46, side 2  | 540: KEEPING SCANDINAVIAN TRADITIONS  
|            | 17th of May and Christmas in a Christian manner. |
Who is a rich man? He who has a good wife.

Good place to retire. Talks about living on the Indian Reservation.

Children speak and understand Norwegian.

Would not like to Norway, very glad he’s here. Mentions dislike for their socialized medicine.

Names and Subjects

**Subject Terms:**
- Armed Forces
- Emigration and immigration
- Family--Norway
- Fishing
- Navy yards & naval stations--Bremerton (Wash.)
- Norway--Social conditions--1945-
- Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
- Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs
- Scandinavian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews

**Personal Names:**
- Beck, Harold Jarle--Interviews
- (creator)
- Bech, Gulle
- Bech, Jens Martin
- Oldsdatter, Karen
- Skjefstad, Anne Gurine
- Strand, Peter
- Beck, John Harold
- Beck, Paul Phillip
- Kjendalen, Ruth Hildegard
- Skjefstad, Kristine Jonette
- Skjefstad, Ole Christianson

**Corporate Names:**
- Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Marysville, Wash.)
- Everett Male Chorus
- Nordlandslaget Nordlyset (Tacoma, Wash.)
- Stavangerfjord (Steamship)

**Family Names:**
- Bech family
- Beck family
Kjendalen family
Skjefstad family

**Geographical Names:**
Bjerka (Norway)
Marysville (Wash.)
Minnesota
Muskego (Wis)
Tacoma (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms:**
Oral histories

**Occupations:**
Construction workers
Farmers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004