

# Bertil Edward Johnson Oral History Interview, 1980

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Johnson, Bertil Edward
<b>Title</b>	Bertil Edward Johnson Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1980 (inclusive) 1980 1980
<b>Quantity</b>	2 file folders 1 sound cassette 2 compact discs.
<b>Collection Number</b>	t043
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Bertil Edward Johnson, a Swedish 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.

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## Biographical Note

Bertil Edward Johnson was born on May 7, 1901 in Tacoma, Washington. Bertil's parents, John and Kristina Johnson, moved to Tacoma from Sweden. They married and had four children, Bertil being the youngest among two boys and two girls. The Johnson family lived in a Scandinavian community where the language and customs were preserved. Bertil began working after school and on the weekends at the age of thirteen. While attending Stadium High School, Bertil worked for the Tacoma Butter Store; he worked for one year after graduating in 1919 in order to save money for college. Then Bertil attended the University of Washington for five years and studied law. He passed the bar exam in 1925 and was appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney in Tacoma in 1926. After 13 months, Bertil was appointed Prosecuting Attorney for Pierce County from 1927-1935. Bertil opened a private practice in 1935, where he worked until 1951 when he became a judge. As a judge, Bertil worked with a lot of respectful Scandinavian people from the area who were attracted by Bertil's ability to speak Swedish. Bertil also worked with the juvenile court and came across many controversial juvenile cases. Even though Bertil was not born in Sweden, he has been very active in the Scandinavian community; he belongs to the

Swedish Order of Valhalla and the Scandinavian Fraternity and at one time participated in the Swedish Order of Vasa and the Scandinavian Old-Timers. He attends a Swedish Lutheran Church, where he has served as the superintendent of Sunday school and as a member of the board of trustees. Bertil has been involved in many non-Scandinavian organizations as well: the Elks, Tacoma Lions Club, Tacoma Boys Club, United Good Neighbor Fund, the Salvation Army, and the Allenmore Medical Foundation. Bertil has three children with his wife Pearl Tate. He appreciates the life he has led and is thankful for the work and the opportunities that have helped him achieve success.

### Lineage

Father: John Edward Johnson. Mother: Stina (Kristina) Maria Jonasson. Paternal Grandfather: Andrew Jonasson. Paternal Grandmother: Britta Maja Larsdotter. Maternal Grandfather: August Jonasson. Maternal Grandmother: Sofia Anderson. Brothers and Sisters: Roy Anders Johnson, Edna Maria Gorder, Astrid Sofia Stancer. Spouse: Pearl Naomi Tate. Children: Judith Naomi Sloan, Linnea Kristina Alm, Bertil Frederick Johnson.

## Content Description

The interview was conducted with Bertil Johnson on May 13, 1980 in Tacoma, Washington. This interview contains information on growing up in Tacoma, attending school, practicing law, and participating in Swedish 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 Bertil Johnson 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

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## 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	
43, side 1	013/09: Bertil Edward Johnson Born in Tacoma on May 7, 1901.
43, side 1	021: PARENTS John Edward Johnson and Kristina Maria Johnson.
43, side 1	032: BROTHERS & SISTERS Roy, Edna, and Astrid. Bertil was the youngest.
43, side 1	054: Father was a streetcar motorman for the Tacoma Railway and Power Company. Came to Tacoma in 1887. They had streetcars pulled by horses then. Panic of 1891. There was a depression then. Lasted for 2 years. Bertil's father was out of work. He got a job at the Tacoma Smelter cleaning breaks for 50 cents a day. Then he got a job driving an electric streetcar. Did this until he retired.
43, side 1	106: Bertil's father was born in Mellerud, Dalsland, Sweden. His family was fairly well-to-do. He finished high school in Sweden. Then his father lost everything. He came to the U.S. after that. Came directly to Tacoma with some friends. He had relatives in Tacoma.

Container(s)	Description
43, side 1	140/10: Bertil's mother was also born in Mellerud, Dalsland, Sweden. Came to U.S. when 18 years old. She told stories about coming over on the steamer. Many hardships. She went to Minneapolis. Worked for a family as a cook. Might have come to the West coast because of Bertil's father. They knew each other in Sweden. Bertil's mother went to school in Sweden. Talked more about church in Sweden than school.
43, side 1	185: The Lutheran church in Sweden was strict. She got some of her education there. She had one brother and 3 sisters. Her brother went to Germany and married a girl from Hamburg. He was killed during the bombardment of the city in Germany he was living in when the allies attacked.
43, side 1	216: Bertil has met this man's son, who lives in Hamburg. Bertil's mother had a sister in Bellingham, Washington and a sister in Pennsylvania.
43, side 1	241: Her father had come to the U.S. He worked in the woods in Minnesota. He died in Minnesota. She went back to Sweden in 1931 to visit her...
43, side 1	254: mother and other relatives. Bertil visited cousins there in 1966. He went to Stockholm and Hamburg. Drank coffee. Ate too much sweet food.
43, side 1	284: Bertil's mother came to Tacoma and got married (probably in the Swedish Lutheran Church). Within a year or two, Bertil's oldest brother was born. The other 3 children were born within 5 years. Bertil was born in their house on 7th and Cushman. There were quite...
43, side 1	335/11: A few Scandinavians there. Then they moved to S. 14th & Sheridan. It was like a Scandinavian colony. There was an Italian colony to the...
43, side 1	400: North, Germans to the south, and Russians to the south. The children of different ethnic backgrounds played with each other. Many couldn't speak...
43, side 1	425: English before they started school. Parent's often learned English from their children.
43, side 1	458:

Container(s)	Description
	<p>Bertil went to Stadium High School in Tacoma. Graduated in 1919. Bertil's family didn't have much. He started working when he was 13. He worked in a fruitstand after school for 3 hours a day. Earned \$2.50 per week. He worked on Saturdays from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. He had to walk from Lincoln School on 16th &amp; K to 11th &amp; Market. He'd work and then walk home. Sometimes he'd take the cable car home.</p>
43, side 1	<p>504/12: While in high school, he worked after school for the Tacoma Butter Store which was on Pacific Ave. where the Seattle 1st National Bank now is. Bertil is not sorry he had to work. Taught him value of time, money.</p>
43, side 1	<p>555: Worked for one year between high school and college to save money. Worked for the five years he went to college. The first year he worked with his brother who had bought a lot of stuff from the United States Shipping Board. Sold hardware. For 2 years he worked for J. Bornstein &amp; Sons who were restaurant and hotel suppliers. He sold dishes and glassware to places in Tacoma and southern Seattle. He worked in a library for his 4th and 5th years. He graduated from the University of Washington in 1925. There were 30-35 graduates, one woman.</p>
43, side 1	<p>614: After he graduated, he took the bar exam in Olympia. The test took 2 days. Bertil passed it.</p>
43, side 1	<p>643: Bertil had a friend, Billy Aspen, who was a judge of the Supreme Court of Washington State. Bertil had thought about going to Shelton, Washington to practice because they only had one lawyer in the county (Mason). Judge Aspen convinced Bertil that he should go back to Tacoma to practice.</p>
43, side 1	<p>674/13: That's where he lived and knew people. Aspen arranged for Bertil to meet with Fred Remen, who had a private practice. Young lawyers were not too welcome in the practice of law in those days. Remen said he'd help Bertil get started. He didn't have an office. He sat in the reception room with the stenographer. Bertil worked there for 6-8 months. Then Remen was appointed to the superior court of Pierce County. Bertil took over his office, which was located in the old Jone's Building on 8th and Broadway.</p>
43, side 1	<p>712: After 3-4 months, Bertil moved into an office with Henry Arnold Peterson in the Washington Building.</p>
43, side 1	719:

Container(s)	Description
	Passed the Bar Exam in June 1925. In Sept. 1926, he was appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney in Tacoma. This was during prohibition.
43, side 1	731: Did this for 13 months. Then was appointed acting Prosecuting Attorney for Pierce County from 1922-35. More than 400 cases on the calendar when he started. He would often work from 8:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. He was in court from 9:00 to 4:30 five days a week. He tells about...
43, side 1	806: Several court cases. Tried many who'd violated prohibition laws: Sheriff of Grays Harbor County, sheriff of Lewis county, and 2 deputies.
43, side 1	858: Tried all kinds of federal cases, civil cases. Indian-Lottman cases.
43, side 1	866/14: Many differences in the way courts are handled now. Judicial process of criminals is much slower now. Now, if people don't get what they...
43, side 1	935/01: want, they go to court. School teachers didn't strike in the old days. There weren't as many strikes in general in those days.
43, side 1	949: Private practice from 1935-51. 50% of his work was criminal work. People thought as prosecuting attorney he'd learned all the ropes.
43, side 1	977: Became judge from 1951-74. He worked with a lot of Scandinavian people. Could speak Swedish. Made them comfortable. Honest people. Respect law.
43, side 1	1009: Bertil doesn't remember ever charging a Scandinavian with a serious crime. The worst they did was go out and get drunk.
43, side 1	1032/02: Scandinavians were honest people. God fearing people. Generous to help one another. Wasn't until 2nd generation that you'd find Scandinavian youngsters stealing. Greatest treasure of many Scandinavians was their citizenship papers. They were not vicious or mean. Great respect for the law and people who held public offices.
43, side 2	115/03:

Container(s)	Description
	Not much trouble in the transition of becoming a judge. Most difficult thing was switching from an advocate to one who is unbiased.
43, side 2	160: After 2 years, took over the juvenile court. Did this for 16 years. Did this on Tuesdays and Fridays. Very challenging, interesting, frustrating. Could do things then that can't do now. He'd hold kids in detention so they would understand they had done wrong. Can't do that now. 1965-66 Supreme Court decided to support the Goff Case. Youngsters were entitled to have an attorney appointed for them and...
43, side 2	208: To have a trial. This has slowed down the process in the Juvenile Court. Judge is no longer in a position where he can look at the facts, the youngster, and the parents, and then do what he thinks is best for the youngster. Judge has to follow prescribed rules.
43, side 2	239: Before, the goal was to make the juveniles understand that what they had done was serious. They always stressed that the juveniles be truthful. Get the kid to confess and clean up his act. Since the Goff Case, juveniles have to be treated as criminals.
43, side 2	326/04: When first on the bench, Bertil worked at the old courthouse on 11th & J street. Inside of building in bad shape. The floor sank about 2 inches during a murder trial because there were so many people inside.
43, side 2	364: JUVENILE CASES Tells about four boys who did \$16,000 damage to Lincoln High School on a Saturday night. They took down the fire hose. Left it on all night. They paid for damage. Two boys used guardianship money. Parents of one mortgaged house. Fourth boy got job at school. Worked every weekend, vacation for \$1.00 per hour.
43, side 2	483/05: Tells about some other juvenile cases. Some high school kids on a football team. Were in good economic shape. Broke into a ski shop. 8 years later one of the boys came to his courtroom and told him he was practicing law in Seattle. He has met many of the youngsters he'd had in juvenile court as adults. He's seen all sides of it. One boy in his court had hung a little girl.
43, side 2	558: SWEDISH ORGANIZATIONS Belongs to the Swedish Order of Valhalla. Member for 50 years. Scandinavian Fraternity. Belonged to Swedish Order of Vasa at one time. Was president of Scandinavian Old-Timers. Went to Swedish Lutheran Church. Served there for many years. Superintendent of Sunday school for 15 years. Served on

Container(s)	Description
	the board of trustees for many years. All of the services were in Swedish until 1950. They had a great minister...
43, side 2	599: H.C. BLOMQUIST Spoke excellent Swedish. Church was on S. 8th & I street. Burned in 1924. Only place for them to go was the Valhalla Temple on K Street. Dances on Saturday night and church on Sunday morning. New church built on 6th & I street. Edward Young, member of the church, was the contractor. He also built Lincoln High School.
43, side 2	628/06: Many Scandinavians who were outstanding citizens in the Tacoma Community. Christopherson - Superintendent of Streets. Carlson - Chief of fire department. Dr. Christian Kvevly (?) a Norwegian. He was very well thought of. The Swedish Order of Valhalla made him an honorary member. Unusual - Norwegians and Swedes didn't get along.
43, side 2	679: Has been active in the Elks. Past president of Tacoma Lions Club. Past president, board of directors of Tacoma Boys Club. Campaign chairman of United Good Neighbor Fund. Tacoma Boys Club started by Fred Remen in 1939. Salvation Army agreed to sponsor Boys Club. Bertil was chairman of advisory committee of Salvation Army. Bertil, Fred, and George Paul put on a campaign to start the first Boys Club.
43, side 2	706/07: Built first Boys Club in 1940-41 on 25th and J Street. They felt they could keep boys out of trouble if they gave them something to do.
43, side 2	755: One of the organizers of the Lutheran Welfare Society. They got together to help the community. This was during the depression. Vincent Thoreen (?) was the first executive director. Had offices on the corner of 15th and Pacific for many years.
43, side 2	801: Active in the Allenmore Medical Foundation. Became member of the board at the hospital in 1935. In 1961 they started the Allenmore Medical Center on 19th and Union. They sold out to the American Medical Order. They built a new hospital. Allenmore made \$500,000 from the sale. They formed the Allenmore Medical Foundation. The interest from that money has to be spent every year. They give 3 scholarships to Pacific Lutheran University. One for \$5,000 to a pre-med student. Two \$2,500 scholarships to senior nursing students. One \$5,000 scholarship for a pre-med student at the University of Puget Sound. For the last 3 years, they have given \$22,000 to the Lutheran Home for beds and medical needs. They also give \$5,000 a year to Tel-med, which is run by



Container(s)	Description
	the Pierce County Medical Society. They gave \$20,000 to the Family Practice Foundation in Tacoma. Money must be given for medical purposes.
43, side 2	886/08: PLU Has spoken at Eastvold Chapel many times. He knew Dr. Eastvold quite well.
43, side 2	910: He has been chairman of the Elks for Santa Lucia Day for 12 years. Members of the SPURS from PLU put on a pageant for the Elks. This takes place on a Sunday. They have a Scandinavian dinner at the Elks with lutefisk, kalvedans, and risgrynsgrøet. In 1979, about 650 people came.
43, side 2	934: WIFE & CHILDREN Wife: Pearl Tate. Children: Judith Sloan: Graduated from Stanford University nursing school. Was in the Navy 2 years. Has 2 kids. They are teenagers. She is getting her masters degree at the Univ. of Washington. Wants to be a nurse practitioner. Took a class on mythology at PLU. Kristina Linnea: Married to Charles Alm. He is vice-president of the Olympic Standard Company. Bertil Frederick: Lawyer in Tacoma.
43, side 2	988/09: "I've had a very interesting life." His mother would have liked him to go into the ministry. He felt that only those who felt a special calling should go into the ministry. He didn't have that. He started out studying Business Administration. Decided to go into Law his junior year. "The thing that has meant the most to me is that I learned to work early in life. I learned to appreciate things. If you learn to work, you learn to enjoy life, be considerate of others. You learn to have a desire to achieve. Money is not the important thing in life."

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Judges -- Washington (State) -- Pierce County  
 Public prosecutors -- Washington (State) -- Pierce County  
 Swedish-Americans -- Ethnic identity  
 Swedish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Swedish-Americans--Social life and customs

### Personal Names :

Alm, Linnea Kristina  
 Anderson, Sofia  
 Johnson, Bertil Edward--Interviews  
 (creator)  
 Jonasson, Andrew  
 Jonasson, Stina (Kristina) Maria  
 Sloan, Judith Naomi  
 Johnson, Bertil Edward

Johnson, Bertil Frederick  
Johnson, John Edward  
Jonasson, August  
Larsdotter, Britta Maja  
Tate, Pearl Naomi

**Corporate Names :**

Allenmore Medical Foundation (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Boys' Club of Tacoma-Pierce County  
Elks (Fraternal order). Tacoma Lodge No. 174  
First Lutheran Church (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Lutheran Welfare Society (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Scandinavian Fraternity of America. Harmony Lodge -- (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Stadium High School (Tacoma, Wash.)  
Swedish Order of Valhalla (Tacoma, Wash.)

**Family Names :**

Anderson family  
Johnson family  
Jonasson family  
Larsdotter family  
Tate family

**Geographical Names :**

Mellerud (Sweden)  
Sundals-Ryr (Sweden)  
Tacoma (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Judges  
Lawyers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
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