

# Knute John Mjøen Oral History Interview, 1981

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Creator</b>	Mjøen, Knute John
<b>Title</b>	Knute John Mjøen Oral History Interview
<b>Dates</b>	1981 (inclusive) 1981 1981
<b>Quantity</b>	3 file folders 2 photographs 1 sound cassette
<b>Collection Number</b>	t110
<b>Summary</b>	An oral history interview with Mjøen, a Norwegian 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

Knute Mjøen was born on November 12, 1902 in Oppdal, Norway to John Moen and Sigrid Mjøen Moen. Since he was born on his mother's farm in the Mjøen community, Knute received the Mjøen name. Knute was the eldest of six children, which included Johan, Martin, Elisabet, Sivert, and Sverre. Knute's father was a shoemaker, and the family lived on a small farm with a few animals and a garden. Knute, however, lived and worked on his aunt's farm. Knute attended school for eight years, including one year of beginning high school, and when he was eighteen years old, he decided to immigrate to America. In February 1921, he traveled to Sioux City, Iowa, where an aunt and uncle of his lived. Knute had minimal language difficulties, having learned some English from his cousins who were raised in Seattle, WA and spoke only English when they visited Knute's family in Norway. Finding a job was not difficult for Knute either. An uncle in Norway had trained him as a painter, and Knute began painting shortly after he arrived in Sioux City. In 1923, Knute moved to Stanwood, WA, where he also had relatives. Jobs were harder to come by here, and Knute lived with an aunt before becoming employed in a shingle mill in Milltown, WA. Knute also had trouble finding employment during the Depression and painted in exchange for food. In 1926, Knute married Gertrude Rise, who was originally from Oppdal, Norway but had been living in central Washington. They had three children: Esther (Hansen), Sylvia (Sill), and John. After Gertrude passed away, Knute was remarried to Violet Larson in 1960. They have

been active church members, and Knute has also been active in the Sons of Norway, which he joined in 1921. He has served as their President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Knute has made four return trips to Norway and continues to speak the language.

### Lineage

Full Name: Knute John Mjøen. Father: John K. Moen. Mother: Sigrid Mjøen Moen. Paternal Grandfather: Knut Prestmo. Paternal Grandmother: Marit Prestmo. Maternal Grandfather: John S. Mjøen. Maternal Grandmother: Elisabet Stoelen Mjøen. Brothers and Sisters: Johan J. Moen, Martin J. Moen, Elisabet J. Moen Aalgard, Sivert J. Moen, Sverre J. Moen. Spouse: Gertrude Rise Mjøen, Violet Larson Mjøen. Children: Esther Mjøen Hansen, Sylvia Mjøen Sill, John Mjøen.

## Content Description

The interview was conducted with Knute Mjøen on October 29, 1981 in Stanwood, WA. It provides information on family background, emigration, work, marriage and family, community activities, and Norwegian heritage. The interview also contains two photographs of Knute. 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 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

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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	
110, side 1	016: PERSONAL BACKGROUND Knut John Mjøen. Johnson is the family name. Mjøen is the name of a community with everyone named Mjøen. Born on November 17, 1902.
110, side 1	059: PARENTS John and Sigrid Moen. Knute was born on his mother's farm. Mother's maiden name was Mjøen. Knute lived with Olene and Marte Mjøen, his aunt not his parents.
110, side 1	114: Father was a shoemaker. They lived on a small farm with a few cows and pigs. They also had a garden. Knute lived and worked on his aunt's farm. They had 25-26 milk cows.
110, side 1	160: FARM Was in Oppdal, Norway in Sør Trøndelag which is eight Norwegian miles south of Trondheim.
110, side 1	173: BROTHERS AND SISTERS Johan worked in a creamery as a machinist. Martin was a fisherman in Seattle. Elisabet immigrated to the U.S. in 1926 and was a housewife in Canada married to a Norwegian. Sivert lived on the home place in Norway and worked in a sawmill. Sverre lives at Hasvaag where he owns a hotel eight miles north of the ocean.

Container(s)	Description
110, side 1	253: Knutе enjoyed living with his aunt. Didn't miss living at home.
110, side 1	275: GRANDPARENTS Father's side, Knute was a shoemaker. He was a husman. Mother's father, John, had a farm in Mj�en. Father's mother was Marit Elisabet. Her maiden name was Stoelen.
110, side 1	362: HOME IN NORWAY Very nice place, big house. Close to 1,000 acres. Lots of cleared land and timber. Raised barley and potatoes.
110, side 1	389: Barley and potatoes were raised in high places like Oppdal which was in a mountain valley. Raised famous potatoes which were banana shaped and colored.
110, side 1	422: 1914, his uncle came from America and took over his aunt's farm.
110, side 1	434: CHRISTMAS Before Christmas they cut lots of wood and piled it up. Women did the baking and the men cleaned around the place.
110, side 1	468: CHRISTMAS EVE Everyone stayed home. At 5 o'clock the church bells rang for an hour. Had a Christmas tree. Very few presents. Usually had a new pair of shoes and a red shirt.
110, side 1	498: CHRISTMAS DAY Went to church. Went visiting and had company in. Christmas usually lasted for two weeks. Men didn't do anything but chores. Women usually cared for the cattle. Women were very busy.
110, side 1	532: FOODS Lots of baked goods, lefse, cookies, and lutefisk. Lutefisk on Christmas Eve, but sometimes had rib steak. Had rommegr�t.
110, side 1	565: CHRISTMAS DAY Had beef roast and pork roast.
110, side 1	586: FIREPLACES IN NORWAY Not used much, mostly for show. Used to cook on these stoves. Also stored wood in the fireplaces to dry it. Had special heating stoves for heating the house.

Container(s)	Description
110, side 1	673: TROLLS AND JULENISSEN Thought that the Julenissen was in the grain in the hayloft.
110, side 1	688: THRESHING GRAINS Had a long stick with a club. They swung this and hit the bundles.
110, side 1	718: JULENISSEN Put food out for him, rissengrøt. Fed him on Christmas Eve.
110, side 1	732: FOODS Ate rissengrøt and sungrøt, which was cooked out of fresh milk, almost like fresh cheese.
110, side 1	753: SCHOOL Eight years and one year of beginning high school. Confirmation.
110, side 1	777: CHURCH There were two churches in Oppdal, Lønset Church and Solkirke. They had the same minister for both churches.
110, side 1	801: CHURCH Took the "sluffe" (a sleigh) to church in the winter and in the summer they took a nice wagon.
110, side 1	818: REASONS FOR COMING TO U.S. Had relations in the U.S. Norwegians like to travel. Knute was the first in his family to come. He was 18.
110, side 1	838: RELATIVES IN THE U.S. He had an aunt and uncle in Sioux City, Iowa and relatives in Stanwood, Washington.
110, side 1	849: Came in 1921 in February to Sioux City, Iowa.
110, side 1	861: Parents and relatives didn't like him leaving Norway.
110, side 1	863: TRAVELS Sailed from Oslo to New York on the Stavangerfjord. Took nine days on the boat. Cost around 1400Kr, which is about \$400. Very nice boat.
110, side 1	891: LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Container(s)	Description
	Could speak some English when he came over, but not much. Learned from his three cousins who came to Norway and they spoke only English.
110, side 1	923: These cousins were born and raised in Seattle, Washington. They went back to Norway after 20 years in the U.S.
110, side 1	937: ELLIS ISLAND No trouble. A lot of fun. Herded like cattle. Had to show that you had \$20. A doctor examined you.
110, side 1	964: TRAIN TRIP Fine. He knew what to eat because he'd learned English well enough in Norway.
110, side 1	977: FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF U.S. Interesting. Cold in Sioux City where his uncle lived. Uncle worked on the railroad. He was a blacksmith.
110, side 1	994: WORK Knute did painting in Sioux City. Learned this trade in Norway from an uncle. No problem finding work. Worked for a Norwegian contractor.
110, side 1	1018: CHURCH Met lots of people there.
110, side 1	1031: No problems with minority groups.
110, side 1	1040: Moved to Stanwood, Washington. Wanted to see the coast, similar to Norway.
110, side 1	1055: No jobs were found in 1923, so he stayed with his aunt in Stanwood. Worked in a shingle mill in Milltown, Washington through the winter.
110, side 1	1082: WAGES \$15 in Sioux City, eight hour days, six days a week. \$5 in the shingle mill. \$5 a day painting. During the Depression, he made \$2-\$3 per day.
110, side 2	040: MARRIAGE Married Gertrude Rise from Central Washington. They were wed in 1926. She was originally from Oppdal, Norway. It had been three years since they came to the U.S.
110, side 2	083: MARRIAGE

Container(s)	Description
	Performed at home. Three couples were married at the same time. Gertrude's brother and sister. Gertrude's father was a wheat farmer.
110, side 2	152: CHILDREN Esther, Sylvia, and John. Esther married Orville Hanson, a painter. They have three children, Patricia, Nick, and Karen. Patricia lives in Cold Bay, Alaska. She's married and is a medic up there. Nick is a salesman. Karen is a student at Western.
110, side 2	207: Sylvia married Dean Sill, both are deceased now. They had five children. Dennis works for Twin City Foods. Rick is a carpenter. Mikes also works for Twin City Foods. Susan works for Twin City Foods too, which is a freezing plant in Stanwood, Washington.
110, side 2	276: John is married and has two girls. He is an ambulance attendant. The two girls are both students.
110, side 2	297: SECOND MARRIAGE Knute remarried Violet Larson. They've been married for 21 years. Knute's first wife died years ago.
110, side 2	341: CHURCH Have been active members.
110, side 2	367: NORWEGIAN ORGANIZATIONS Sons of Norway member since 1921. Served as President, Secretary and Treasurer. Still goes to their meetings. A lot of nice people there. Kept up with the Norwegian heritage.
110, side 2	402: Norwegian classes every Monday night a few times a year. Singing and folk dancing.
110, side 2	414: LANGUAGE Continues to speak the language.
110, side 2	434: TRIPS TO NORWAY In 1952, he went alone. In 1962, Violet and her son, Alan went with him. In 1972, all three went again. In 1979, Knute and his wife went.
110, side 2	460: CHANGES New buildings. People are more modern. High prices.
110, side 2	485:

Container(s)	Description
	Homes kept up nicely in Norway.
110, side 2	491: CHURCH IN NORWAY They don't attend much except for special days.
110, side 2	524: CHURCH IN NORWAY Different church there now, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics, and Pentecostals.
110, side 2	540: NORWEGIAN HERITAGE Proud, Norwegians are sturdy people
110, side 2	564: NORWEGIAN TAXES They pass less taxes on a well kept home. Different from the U.S.
110, side 2	579: SOCIALIZED MEDICINE Hard at times to get into hospitals or see a doctor. Don't pay for service.
110, side 2	599: OLD PEOPLE IN NORWAY Well cared for. Rest homes are nice. Many old people stay home with their family near. Old people get help from the state.
110, side 2	642: WORK IN NORWAY Most people are working. No unemployment to speak of. Farms are very efficient today, more modern.
110, side 2	666: OLD HOME FARM They milk cows and sell the milk to the creameries.
110, side 2	688: SPOKEN NORWEGIAN Good, clear example of the language.

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Christmas  
 Emigration and immigration  
 Family--Norway  
 Marriage service  
 Norway--Social conditions--1945-  
 Norwegian language  
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews  
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs  
 Railroad travel

### Personal Names :

Knute John Mjølén Oral History Interview, 1981  
<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv87555>

Hansen, Esther (Mjøen)  
Mjøen, Gertrude (Rise)  
Mjøen, John  
Prestmo, Knut  
Prestmo, Marit  
Sill, Sylvia (Mjøen)  
Mjøen, Elisabet Stoelen  
Mjøen, John S.  
Mjøen, Violet (Larson)  
Mjøen, Knute--Interviews  
(creator)  
Moen, John  
Moen, Sigrid (Mjøen)

**Corporate Names :**

Ellis Island (N.J. and N.Y.)  
Sons of Norway (U.S.) Fritjov Lodge No.17 (Stanwood, Wash.)  
Stavangerfjord (Steamship)

**Family Names :**

Johnson family  
Larson family  
Mjøen family  
Moen family  
Prestmo family  
Stølen family

**Geographical Names :**

Oppdal herad (Norway)  
Sioux City (Iowa)  
Stanwood (Wash.)

**Form or Genre Terms :**

Oral histories

**Occupations :**

Painters

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler  
2004