

Sylvia (Solveig) Rasmussen Hanson Oral History Interview, 1982

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Hansen, Sylvia (Solveig) Rasmussen
Title	Sylvia (Solveig) Rasmussen Hanson Oral History Interview
Dates	1982 (inclusive) 1982 1982
Quantity	3 file folders 1 photograph 1 sound cassette
Collection Number	t248
Summary	An oral history interview with Sylvia (Solveig) Rasmussen Hanson, 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

Sylvia Hanson was born Solveig Rasmussen on August 17, 1906 in Borge, Torpeberget, Østfold, Norway. She was one of 6 children by Ole Anton and Nora Josefine (Halvorson) Rasmussen. Before coming to America, her family lived in Borge, near Fredrikstad, where her father worked in a sawmill. The entire family emigrated in August 1913 and traveled through Oslo and Liverpool, England before reaching Quebec, Canada; they then took a train through Michigan to Minneapolis, Minnesota. No one in the family spoke English, and Sylvia started school in Minneapolis. The family then lived on several farms in the northeast corner of Montana, moving as the family grew.

In the fall, Sylvia went with her mother to the threshing crews, where she translated and her mother cooked. In addition, Sylvia helped out on the farm, missing school to do so at times. Her father obtained citizenship for the entire family in Plentywood, Montana, the county seat of Sheridan, when she was

about 13 years old. When she was 14, she helped an aunt with the housework and children, and went to another farm to help the family there.

She was confirmed and married at the parsonage in Scobey, which was about 8-10 miles away from the third farm the family lived on in Montana. Her husband, Clarence Hanson, was originally from Minnesota, but his parents lived in Scobey; he was of Norwegian descent and could speak the language, though he didn't like to. He was a hired man at the Peterson place where Sylvia was the hired girl when she was 17, and they were married on February 21, 1928; after her marriage, she did not work outside the home. They lived and farmed shares on the uncle's farm and one daughter, Cora, was born there. They moved to different farms, primarily in Montana, and moved to work on the Fort Peck dam in the 1930's; Clarence worked for the J.A. Torling (?) Construction Company there, first as a laborer and then as a mechanic-welder. In 1941, he was transferred to Hermiston, Oregon, where he continued to work in construction. He died of a heart attack on March 24, 1957 in Moses Lake, Washington. After her father died and her mother had a stroke, Sylvia brought her to Moses Lake and cared for her from 1959-61, when she died at the age of 84.

All of her children-Doris Evelyn, Cora Vivian, Mildred Sylvina, and Clarence Leonard-were born in Montana, and she has 12 grandchildren and 14 or 15 great-grandchildren. She took a trip to Norway with Astrid Rasmussen Peterson, her father's niece, on June 27, 1969, and visited cousins there. She has been active in several community groups-a member of Sons of Norway for 15 years; doing circle and general work in her church; and distributing food and clothing two days a week with a local community service group. In addition, she helps teach a class in Norwegian at her church one night a week during the school year.

Lineage

Full Name: Sylvia Hanson Maiden. Name: Solveig Rasmussen. Father: Ole Anton Rasmussen. Mother: Nora Josefine Halvorson. Paternal Grandfather: Rasmus (Oleson ?). Paternal Grandmother: Britta Oleson. Brothers and Sisters: Sverre Rasmussen, Bjarne Rasmussen (drowned), Aase (Annie) Rasmussen, Sigurd Rasmussen, Howard Rasmussen. Spouse: Clarence Hanson. Children: Doris Evelyn Hanson, Cora Vivian Hanson, Mildred Sylvina Hanson, Clarence Leonard Hanson.

Content Description

The interview was conducted with Sylvia Hanson in Moses Lake, Washington on June 15, 1983. This interview provides information on family history, the accidental drowning of a younger brother, Christmas traditions in Norway and the U.S., maintenance of Norwegian customs, voyage to America, school in Minneapolis, farming in Montana, marriage and family, citizenship, experience with gypsies in Montana, visit to Norway, community involvement, Norwegian heritage. 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 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, WashingtonUniversity of Washington Press1993

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	
248, side 1	055: FAMILY BACKGROUND Sylvia Hanson was born Solveig Rasmussen on August 17, 1906, in Borge, Torpeberget, Østfold, Norway. They lived in the little town of Borge (near Fredrikstad) where her father worked in a sawmill.

Container(s)	Description
248, side 1	<p>095: FAMILY BACKGROUND</p> <p>Sylvia Hanson was born Solveig Rasmussen on August 17, 1906, in Borge, Torpeberget, Østfold, Norway. They lived in the little town of Borge (near Fredrikstad) where her father worked in a sawmill.</p>
248, side 1	<p>144: BROTHERS AND SISTERS</p> <p>The four oldest children (Sverre, Bjarne, Solveig, and Aase) were born in Norway. The younger two were born in America: Sigurd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Howard in Montana. Sylvia's original name was Solveig - spelled Solvej on a family paper.</p>
248, side 1	<p>197: BJARNE</p> <p>Sverre, Bjarne (about seven years old), and a friend were playing down by the river after visiting Grandma Rasmussen. A boat had just pulled out with the waves making the dock wet; Bjarne slipped and went under. Sverre tried to reach him but couldn't. He ran home where his mother fetched his father home from work. The father and his brothers spent two solid days and nights plus other times in the boat searching, but Bjarne was never found.</p>
248, side 1	<p>228: GRANDPARENTS</p> <p>Doesn't remember the maternal grandparents. Paternal grandmother was Brita and grandfather was Rasmus (Olson ?).</p>
248, side 1	<p>265: NORWEGIAN HOME</p> <p>Has a picture of her birthplace, a real nice large house - three stories plus a basement - set up on a hill overlooking the Glomma River. Later they moved to another nice house, close in. Both houses had a small cottage nearby where the women cooked and baked. The large house was kept immaculate. A dressmaker came once a month to sew. In preparation for the emigration trip, the dressmaker made dresses for Sylvia and Aase.</p>
248, side 1	<p>303: FATHER</p> <p>Dad worked steadily as a laborer at the sawmill. Smoked a long, old-fashioned pipe.</p>
248, side 1	<p>313: CHRISTMAS</p> <p>Both in Norway and America, the Christmas Eve dinner was lutefisk and boiled potatoes. Preparation for Christmas began three months before with butchering and making headcheese, sausages, etc. After an early Christmas Eve dinner, the dishes were done before packages could be opened. Had a tree in the big house, which they circled with joined hands singing Norwegian songs. That was followed by desserts of sandbakkels, spritz, julekake. There was a big dinner on Christmas day of roast pork, meatballs, etc.</p>
248, side 1	<p>362: NORWEGIAN CUSTOMS</p>

Container(s)	Description
	In Montana, the parents did folk dancing in costumes. For the syttende mai, the children were dressed up in aprons, skirts, caps, knickers.
248, side 1	<p>378: EMIGRATION</p> <p>The entire family emigrated in 1913. Mother's uncle, Fred (Fridtjof) Halvorson, had been in Minneapolis and Montana; he thought her father could get a job with good wages. Mother, because of her parents, didn't want to leave; she never did like Montana. They were in their early 40's in 1913, the mother a few years older than the father.</p>
248, side 1	<p>449: FRED AND ANNA HALVORSON IN MONTANA</p> <p>He was a farmer in Montana and encouraged Ole to farm also. Ole bought 80 acres, but needed help to run the farm at first, because he didn't know how.</p>
248, side 1	<p>482: EMIGRATION</p> <p>They emigrated in August 1913; Sylvia had her seventh birthday on the ocean. They took the train from Fredrikstad to Oslo, a boat to Liverpool and across the Atlantic to Quebec and a train through Michigan to Minneapolis. Traveling companions were neighbors [Torson] from Norway who had been to America before.</p>
248, side 1	<p>534:</p> <p>Her mother carried a little basket containing her favorite tea cups, but some were broken. Many trunks were shipped over. They were used for the Minneapolis to Montana trip also. Tells a story how one of the trunks' contents were knocked about when the cattle got out and into the yard where the trunks were being stored before being unpacked (in Montana, spring of 1915).</p>
248, side 1	<p>566: SETTLING IN</p> <p>No one in the family knew English. Sylvia started school in Minneapolis and learning English was hard. Tells about a school situation. She broke out with measles soon after school began. Had to stay home in a darkened room (to protect her eyesight). Later used a beginning reader to help with English.</p>
248, side 1	<p>608: LANGUAGE AT HOME</p> <p>Her father learned most of his English in Montana by books (dictionary). Mother could understand English, but didn't want to speak it. When the whole family was present, Norwegian was spoken. The three kids spoke English amongst themselves. Sometime later, they boarded a teacher of Norwegian background; she helped everyone, including the mother.</p>
248, side 1	<p>630:</p> <p>The parents never returned to Norway; they remained in Montana. When her father died and her mother had a stroke, Sylvia brought her to Moses Lake and cared for her from 1959 - 61 when she died at the age of 84.</p>
248, side 1	<p>654: FARMING IN MONTANA</p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>The family lived on several farms all in the northeast corner of Montana. The largest town, Wolf Point, was 57 miles southwest; smaller communities were Scobey (20 miles away), Flaxville, and Navajo (six miles away). The first farm of 80 acres was enlarged by buying another 80 acres (called Eagle's Nest) of pasture and water for cattle. As the family grew, they moved. The third farm was 380 acres and had a nine-room house. Besides farming, her father worked an underground coal mine; the coal was good - black and shiny (probably lignite) - which was sold in neighboring towns. The 380 acres were in grain crops: flax and two different types of wheat. Had some animals for home use: chickens, turkeys, cattle, and pigs. Sylvia was 12, worked in the field and helped haul grain to the elevators. The family lived there until Dad died; Mom moved into Scobey. The brothers took over the farm which is vacant and the buildings boarded up now.</p>
248, side 1	<p>701: A lot of Scandinavians lived in the area; had a few Catholic neighbors who were really nice. In the fall, her mom went with the threshing crew to cook; had a little cooker pulled by horses, and Sylvia went with to translate. The threshers spent about three days at each farm. The kids, especially Sverre and Sylvia, missed school to help on the farm: threshing in the fall and field preparation-planting in the spring. Sverre and Sylvia operated the equipment in the field (plow, drag, seed drill) while Dad repaired and maintained it.</p>
248, side 1	<p>725: WORK At 14 she helped an aunt with housework and children. Went to another farm to help the family also.</p>
248, side 1	<p>738: CONFIRMATION Church was in Scobey not too far away - 8 - 10 miles. Hard to go during the winter months. She was confirmed and married (at the parsonage) there.</p>
248, side 1	<p>745: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY Clarence Hanson was originally from Minnesota but his folks were living in Scobey. He was a hired man at the Peterson place where she was the hired girl (17 years old).</p>
248, side 2	<p>065: Clarence could speak Norwegian (his father was Norwegian; his mother might have been Norwegian-Swedish), but he didn't like to.</p>
248, side 2	<p>086: They were married February 21, 1928. Clarence and Sylvia lived and farmed shares on the uncle's farm. Cora was born here. They moved around to different farms primarily in Montana.</p>
248, side 2	<p>168: FORT PECK DAM</p>

Container(s)	Description
	Clarence and Aase's husband went to work on the Ft. Peck Dam project because crops had been bad for seven years. Both families moved there in the 1930's. Clarence worked there for the J. A. Torling (?) Construction Co., first as a laborer, then becoming a mechanic-welder. He was transferred to Hermiston, Oregon, in 1941; continued to work in construction.
248, side 2	216: CHILDREN All the children were born in Montana: Doris, Cora, Mildred, and Clarence. She also had 12 grandchildren and 14 or 15 great-grandchildren.
248, side 2	243: CITIZENSHIP Father got citizenship for the whole family in Plentywood, Montana (Sheridan county seat); Sylvia was about 13 years old.
248, side 2	268: GYPSIES When living on the second childhood farm (small farm with tar-papered, two room house), they were visited by Gypsies. The folks had gone to Flaxville, and the kids were home alone. When they saw wagons, horses, dogs, etc., coming down the road, they closed the windows and doors. The Gypsies stayed up in the field. Still there when folks came home. Mother didn't like Gypsies at all; had a previous experience in Norway with them.
248, side 2	293: WORK Sylvia did not work outside the home after marriage. Her husband died of a heart attack on March 24, 1957, in Moses Lake. He had never had any problem finding work after Ft. Peck, as his mechanical-welding skills were in demand.
248, side 2	337: RETURN TRIP TO NORWAY Sylvia and a cousin, Astrid Rasmussen Peterson (Ole's niece), flew over on June 27, 1969. They visited cousins and had a most wonderful trip.
248, side 2	394: COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES Sylvia is active in several community groups. She's been a member of Sons of Norway for 15 years and attends meetings. She helps in her church with circle and general work. She's most active in a local community service helping to distribute food and clothing two days a week.
248, side 2	440: NORWEGIAN HERITAGE There's a lot of Norwegians in Moses Lake. She's kind of proud of being Norwegian and helps teach a class in Norwegian at the church. Anyone can come every Monday night (during the school year); had as many as 15 students.
248, side 2	483: PHILOSOPHY ON LIFE She's been happy, healthy, and active - fortunately.

Container(s)	Description
248, side 2	502: Snakker litt norsk.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Christmas
 Emigration and immigration
 Family--Norway
 Norway--Social conditions--1945-
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs
 Ocean travel

Personal Names :

Halvorson, Nora Josefine
 Hanson, Cora Vivian
 Hanson, Doris Evelyn
 Hanson, Mildred Sylvina
 Hanson, Sylvia--Interviews
 (creator)
 Rasmussen, Ole Anton
 Hanson, Clarence
 Hanson, Clarence Leonard
 Oleson, Britta
 Peterson, Astrid Rasmussen
 Rasmussen, Solveig
 Rasmussen, Sylvia

Corporate Names :

Fort Peck Dam (Mont.)

Family Names :

Hanson family
 Oleson family
 Rasmussen family

Geographical Names :

Torpeberget (Norway)
 Flaxville (Mont.)
 Fort Peck (Mont.)
 Hermiston (Or.)
 Minneapolis (Minn.)
 Moses Lake (Wash.)
 Navajo (Mont.)
 Plentywood (Mont.)
 Scobey (Mont.)
 Wolf Point (Mont.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Sylvia (Solveig) Rasmussen Hanson Oral History Interview, 1982
<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv99183>

Farmers
Mechanics
Miners
Sawmill workers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004