Overview of the Collection

Creator: Hansen, Sylvia (Solveig) Rasmussen
Title: Sylvia (Solveig) Rasmussen Hanson Oral History Interview
Dates: 1982 (inclusive)
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

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

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


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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassette</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
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.

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.

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.

Doesn’t remember the maternal grandparents. Paternal grandmother was Brita and grandfather was Rasmus (Olson?).

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.

Dad worked steadily as a laborer at the sawmill. Smoked a long, old-fashioned pipe.

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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>248, side 1</td>
<td>In Montana, the parents did folk dancing in costumes. For the syttende mai, the children were dressed up in aprons, skirts, caps, knickers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 248, side 1 | 378: EMIGRATION  
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. |
| 248, side 1 | 449: FRED AND ANNA HALVORSON IN MONTANA  
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. |
| 248, side 1 | 482: EMIGRATION  
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. |
| 248, side 1 | 534:  
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). |
| 248, side 1 | 566: SETTLING IN  
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. |
| 248, side 1 | 608: LANGUAGE AT HOME  
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. |
| 248, side 1 | 630:  
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. |
| 248, side 1 | 654: FARMING IN MONTANA |
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.

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.

At 14 she helped an aunt with housework and children. Went to another farm to help the family also.

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.

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).

Clarence could speak Norwegian (his father was Norwegian; his mother might have been Norwegian-Swedish), but he didn't like to.

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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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.                                                                                                                                                           |
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:
Farmers
Mechanics
Miners
Sawmill workers

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
2004