

Ester Irene Sundvik Oral History Interview, 1981

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Sundvik, Ester Irene
Title	Ester Irene Sundvik Oral History Interview
Dates	1981 (inclusive) 1981 1981
Quantity	3 file folders 1 photographs 1 sound cassette
Collection Number	t091
Summary	An oral history interview with Ester Irene Sundvik, a Finnish 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

Ester Sundvik was born in Ödkarby on the Åland Islands, which are located halfway between Sweden and Finland. The islands belong to Finland, but the people that live on them speak Swedish. Ester's parents were Julia Adarina Hinder and Gustav Fristedt. Gustav was a baker and met Julia in a bakery. When Ester was three months old, Gustav emigrated to the United States and was never heard of again. Julia remained on their small farm in Ödkarby, where Ester was raised along with her two older sisters Wilhemina and Ingrid. Julia sold calves, milk, and butter and also worked as a midwife and kindergarten teacher. Ester attended school for six years but decided not to proceed further because she wanted domestic training instead. Ester was also confirmed, after which she went to work in Stockholm for one year. In Stockholm, Ester became homesick and returned home to help her mother before obtaining a job for a local minister. In 1922, Ester's friend Edith convinced Ester to emigrate to America with her despite opposition from her mother and the minister. It took the girls eleven days to get from Finland to New York, and upon their arrival in New York, they found employment with a Swedish woman. The Swedish woman did not prove to be very good boss, however, discouraging the girls from learning English and failing to feed them well. After nine or ten months, Ester and Edith

left to learn English. Ester eventually found a cooking job for a couple in Connecticut. After working in Connecticut, Ester went to Boston working for a family with four children. She stayed there for three years. Ester had saved money to visit her mother in Finland. After visiting her mother, Ester returned to New York where she met her husband. Her daughter was born in New York. Ester's husband got a job with the Pentagon in Washington D.C. and in 1943, he sent her tickets for Vancouver, Washington. In October 1943, Ester started a nursery for the Shipyard workers' children. In Vancouver, her home was torn down to make way for a highway. Ester moved to Illinois when they did this but returned to Vancouver later.

Lineage

Full Name: Ester Irene Sundvik. Maiden Name: Ester Irene Fristedt. Father: Gustav Fristedt. Mother: Julia Adarina Hinder. Brothers and Sisters: Wilhemina Fristedt, Ingrid Fristedt. Spouse: (?) Sundvik. Children: One daughter.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Ester Sundvik on September 29, 1981 in Vancouver, Washington. It contains information on family background, emigration, employment, marriage and family, and moving to the West Coast. 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 Donna Mallonee 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

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	
91, side 1	004: Ester Irene Sundvik Maiden name was Fristedt. Born in Ödkarby on the Åland Islands. The islands belong to Finland but the people speak Swedish. Located half way between Sweden and Finland.
91, side 1	024: Lived out in the country by the woods, firs and pines. Close to the water. Took cows to the pasture.
91, side 1	033: PARENTS Julia Adarina Hinder and Gustav Fristedt. Father spoke both Swedish and Finnish. Some relatives changed their name to a Finnish name. Father was a baker. He met his wife in a bakery where she sold bread. Father was born in Björneborg (Pori in Finnish), Finland.
91, side 1	058: GRANDPARENTS Maternal grandfather was a ceramic maker, sold his wares in Finland. Made bowls, flower pots, vases, and candlesticks.
91, side 1	083: SISTERS Two older. Wilhemina and Ingrid. Ingrid is a nurse in Finland.

Container(s)	Description
91, side 1	092: FATHER When Ester was 3 months old her father went to America. Ester, her mother and 2 sisters stayed on the little farm. Sold calves, butter, milk. Mother was a midwife in town. She also taught kindergarten in her home.
91, side 1	121: Father was never seen again. Ester never interested in seeing him again. Mother was a hard worker, she never complained, never was idle. Knit, sewed. She died at age 89.
91, side 1	140: CHILDHOOD HOME Can still see it when she closes her eyes. Has a little fireplace in the bedroom. This was the heat source.
91, side 1	159: FOODS Mother was a good cook. She had experience from the bakery, carrot pudding, leverlåda (ground liver, rice, raisins with egg custard on top of it.) Meatballs, pork roast, side roast. Made sausage, head cheese, rullepölsa. Everything was put in the brine so it would keep longer.
91, side 1	183: Had a garden. Beets, cabbage, carrots, rutabaga. Kept food in a fruit cellar. This was dug in dirt, lined with bricks, had a roof made of shingles. Kept vegetables and dairy products in it in the summer.
91, side 1	205: Land was separated from the house. Had a big lawn, wood shed, barn. Did not have inside plumbing.
91, side 1	212: Mother raised flowers. Daughters were in charge of them: lilacs, cornflowers, irises, forget-me-nots, violets, and lily of the valley.
91, side 1	235: Picked berries in the woods. Blueberries, lingonberries, cranberries, and smultron, like small strawberries.
91, side 1	247: Mother used linament made of turpentine and ammonia for pains. Made juice out of black currant, used this for winters colds and coughs. Also used chamomile tea when the girls were sick. Was a doctor not far away, but Ester did not go to the doctor until she came to the US.
91, side 1	277: CHRISTMAS

Container(s)	Description
	Lasted 20 days. Neighbors all had parties. Cut the tree down from the woods. Snow up to their waist. Decorated the tree with baskets, handmade decorations. Candles on the tree.
91, side 1	309: Midsummer another highlight in their lives. Decorated outside with birch trees.
91, side 1	327: Had bonfires on the beach the 1st day of May. Climbed the mountain to see all the fires. Sang "I dag är det första maj."
91, side 1	366: SCHOOL Went for 6 years. Could go on for further learning. Ester wanted domestic education.
91, side 1	382: CONFIRMATION Went away and lived with an older lady. Went for 1 year. Learned many hymns.
91, side 1	408: Stayed home after confirmation. Went to Stockholm and worked for a captain's widow for 1 year. She had a guestroom to serve people who came to Stockholm. Ester worked hard. She was homesick. Went home to help her mother. Went to work for a minister, she lived at the parsonage. Knitted wives stockings, cared for the plants, brought wood in. Made fires every morning. Pastor's wife was the sister of the famous architect in Finland, Lars Sonk.
91, side 1	470: It just happened that Ester went to America. Ester's friend Edith went to America and asked Ester to go. Mother and minister didn't want her to go.
91, side 1	500: BOAT TRIP Brought a few clothes over and bread. Took 11 days to get from Goeteborg to New York. 1922 was the year of emigration. Seasick.
91, side 1	517: ELLIS ISLAND Saddest thing that Ester had ever seen. Spent one night there. Six people in one small room. "Is this America...thought it would be beautiful." Gives good account of Ellis Island.
91, side 1	564: Stayed in New York. Knew someone there. Was sponsored by friend's sister. Came to a very famous place 711 5th Avenue. Her friends were caretakers there.
91, side 1	602: WORK

Container(s)	Description
	Went to employment agency with her friend Edith. Woman came looking for 2 girls. Needed interpreters, could not understand any English. The lady was of Swedish descent so she could speak fluent Swedish. She did not want the girls to learn English or they might leave.
91, side 1	683: One of Ester's friends worked for Ethyl Barrymoore. Ester visited them sometimes.
91, side 2	004: Worked there for 9-10 months. A friend who had come over with them on the boat looked after them. They quit this job and their boss got angry.
91, side 2	032: They left to learn English. Ester continues talking about experiences with this Swedish boss.
91, side 2	064: Ester and Edith were sick, malnutrition while working for this lady. They were not fed well.
91, side 2	080: Needed a girl at Ethyl Barrymoore's place. Ester took care of the children. Worked for them during the summer.
91, side 2	100: Got a job in Connecticut during the summer, did cooking. This was for the Stantons. This was the best job she ever had. Cooked for 2. Lived by the water. Gives more details about this work experience.
91, side 2	125: Met husband in New York.
91, side 2	125: Came back to New York from Connecticut. A friend from Finland told her Boston was nicer than New York. Ester went to Boston.
91, side 2	140: WORK Went to employment agency looking for work, a Swedish agency. A lady came and interviewed her. There were 4 children to care for. The lady was skeptical because Ester was so young. Had a two weeks trial period.
91, side 2	159:

Container(s)	Description
	Took a taxi to their house. Lived in Massachusetts. The biggest house Ester had ever seen. She describes the home. Children ate separately from the parents, Mr. and Mrs. Perkins.
91, side 2	186: Had fish the first night she was there. Could not read cookbooks so fixed it the way that her mother had. Ester did substituting of things.
91, side 2	202: Baked bread. Turned out quite well. She became good friends with the children. Oldest son helped her to learn English. Stayed for 3 years.
91, side 2	226: Ester had saved enough money to go visit her mother in Finland. She made \$90 a month, good for the times. Spent Christmas in Finland.
91, side 2	241: She returned and stayed in New York. Met her husband who was staying with some friends.
91, side 2	252: Got a job in Brooklyn for a lady. Cooking, cleaning, and washing. Made \$75 a month. Worked there for years.
91, side 2	280: Got a job with her husband on Long Island. Did housework, her husband chauffeured. Ester taught him how to do his job.
91, side 2	289: Daughter born in New York. Husband got a job with the Pentagon in Washington D.C. Ester worked for a dentist part-time in D.C. Husband sent her tickets to leave September 20, 1943 for Vancouver, Washington.
91, side 2	351: Got an apartment in Vancouver. Had coal stove for cooking and heat. Lots of people in Vancouver working in shipyards.
91, side 2	375: NURSERY In October, Ester started a Nursery for Shipyard workers children. The workers were paid quite well. Everything on ration cards. Had buses for transportation.
91, side 2	387: Did not have time to join Scandinavian groups. Did catering for people. Cleaned houses and did cooking for people.
91, side 2	408:

Container(s)	Description
	A highlight for Ester's life was working in the Nursery. Ester also christened a ship in Vancouver. They were celebrating because they had made 2 extra ships for the Navy. She also received a promotion as cook. The ship was named the U.S.S. Hoggatt Bay.
91, side 2	454: DESCRIBES THE FINNISH/SWEDISH PEOPLE Cannot really say. Has met every kind of people. There is a resemblance in every nationality. Some differences in thinking, beliefs, etc. Finns are supposed to be temperamental, clean people.
91, side 2	489: Ester says her favorite saying that her mother taught her. She says this every night. She says this in Swedish.
91, side 2	506: HOUSE IN VANCOUVER, WASH. Built their own home while husband alive. Husband died from two shots of penicillin, he had a negative reaction. He was sick from May - August.
91, side 2	538: They came and told Ester that the highway was going by where their house was. This losing her home and her husband were the saddest things that happened to her while in America.
91, side 2	562: Ester moved to Illinois when they tore down her home. She now lives in an apartment in Vancouver, Wash.

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Emigration and immigration
 Family--Finland
 Finland--Economic conditions
 Finnish-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
 Finnish-Americans--Social life and customs

Personal Names :

Fristedt, Ingrid
 Fristedt, Wilhemina
 Sundvik, Ester Irene (Fristedt)--Interviews
 (creator)
 Barrymore, Ethel
 Fristedt, Gustav
 Hinder, Julia Adarina

Corporate Names :

Ellis Island Immigration Station (N.J. and N.Y.)

Family Names :

Fristedt family
Hinder family
Sundvik family

Geographical Names :

Åland (Finland)
Boston (Mass.)
Brooklyn (N.Y.)
Connecticut
New York (N.Y.)
Vancouver (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Childcare workers
Cooks
Domestics

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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