

Bertha Østby Davidson Oral History Interview, 1978

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Davidson, Bertha Østby
Title	Bertha Østby Davidson Oral History Interview
Dates	1978 (inclusive) 1978 1978
Quantity	2 file folders 1 sound cassette 2 compact discs
Collection Number	t006
Summary	An oral history interview with Bertha Østby Davidson, 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

Bertha Davidson was born on January 7, 1892 in Østby, Norway. She was the youngest of four girls and one boy and immigrated to America with a neighbor when she was sixteen. Bertha moved "just for fun" and did not plan on staying for more than a year but ended up staying for five. The neighbor was attending Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and Bertha stayed there as well to learn English. When she first returned to Norway, she felt she had changed and nothing was there for her anymore. She returned to Concordia College where she knew Dr. Aasgaard, Concordia's president from 1911-1925. Dr. Aasgaard introduced Bertha to Ole K. Davidson (OK) who was studying at the seminary. When he finished his studies there, the two were married and moved to Glendive, Montana, where they stayed for seven years. Bertha had many responsibilities as a pastor's wife, including entertaining, hostessing, housing other pastors, and heading various church organizations. She also taught Sunday school and sang in the choir, which left her little free time. In Glendive, their son Paul was born. Following Glendive, the family moved to California for five years, where they had

several churches in North Sacramento. They later moved to Portland, Oregon and finally to Tacoma, Washington, where they settled for good

Lineage

Full Name: Bertha Davidson. Maiden Name: Bertha Østby. Father: Asmund Østby. Brothers and Sisters: Rachel, plus two other sisters and one brother Spouse: Ole K. (O.K.) Davidson. Children: Paul Davidson.

Content Description

This interview was conducted with Bertha Davidson on April 25, 1978 in Tacoma, Washington. The interview contains information on Bertha's family background, emigration, return trips to Norway, life as a pastor's wife, and Norwegian heritage. Also see Ole Davidson, T204 & 205.

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

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	
6, side 1	005: FAMILY BACKGROUND Full name is Bertha Davidson; Østby is her maiden name. She was 84 years old at the time of the interview, having been born on January 7, 1892, in Østby Norway, a large community.
6, side 1	042: Husband is O.K. [Ole] Davidson. They have one son, Paul, who is married and lives in Tacoma. He works for a large plant and has no children.
6, side 1	064: EMIGRATION Bertha emigrated in 1912 when she was 16. She came "just for fun. I wasn't going to stay". A neighbor lady who attended Concordia College [Academy] visited at home in Norway and asked Bertha if she'd like to travel to America. Bertha came and though "I said I wouldn't stay more than a year, I stayed five years before I came back". Bertha was at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota studying mostly the English language because it was necessary being a newcomer.
6, side 1	105: Neighbor lady was an Østby also. Maybe four or five different families were Østby 's in this area. Bertha's father, Asmund, was a builder-farmer. She had one brother and three sisters; Bertha was the youngest.
6, side 1	140: 140 Mother didn't like her to go, but Father did because he felt there was nothing special in Norway for Bertha to do. Bertha went back to visit after five

Container(s)	Description
	years, but things and people had changed: "You don't feel the same when you've been away".
6, side 1	<p>168:</p> <p>She knew Aasgaard [Johan Arnd], Concordia's president [from 1911-1925]. She stayed in America at Concordia because she felt she had more opportunity there. One sister, Rachel, emigrated and married an American. But they returned to Norway. He was a Norwegian who had lived here six, seven years. He bought the home place, but sister never liked living on the farm. The oldest sister married, but died when she was young. Other sister married and lived in Hardanger, Norway, and had one son. Husband had a small piece of land but worked as a builder. Her brother was also a carpenter and built homes. He married and had four children.</p>
6, side 1	<p>240:</p> <p>Her first visit to Norway lasted one month, but she couldn't find anything to do that she wanted. Dr. Aasgaard said he'd help her find something around Moorhead. He also helped her learn the language while she worked.</p>
6, side 1	<p>261: MARRIAGE</p> <p>Bertha met O.K. (Ole) at the seminary. She was working for Dr. Aasgaard and attending Concordia Academy, and he introduced her to "this nice fellow". When OK finished seminary work, they were married. His parents came from Norway to Minnesota. They had nine children, four born in Norway including OK who was the oldest.</p>
6, side 1	<p>293:</p> <p>Bertha traveled by boat when she emigrated and when she first visited home. She returned to Norway three more times. The boat trip was very good; she had a first class ticket. Third class people were "scrap"; brought own food and were from other countries. She traveled with the neighbor lady and her brother who had arranged and paid for the trip. Bertha worked to pay them back. There was nothing in Norway for her. "It was too hard to get places...in Norway. You really have to have something back of you, come from a good family and all those things, in those days".</p>
6, side 1	<p>346:</p> <p>She attended primary school in Norway. In America, it was possible for anybody to attend school, but they had to work themselves through. Her brother took over the home place, and the rest of the family couldn't all remain there, so that's when Bertha emigrated.</p>
6, side 1	<p>388:</p> <p>No trouble at Ellis Island because neighbors took care of that. They took the train from Ellis Island to Moorhead.</p>
6, side 1	406: RETURN TRIPS TO NORWAY

Container(s)	Description
	<p>Bertha returned to Norway twice before marriage and twice after with O. K.. Parents were alive the first times. She has kept touch with her relatives except the younger generation. The oldest sister died when young. The next was married and her husband died; she was living there when Bertha left for America. All are dead now, and Bertha knows only one nephew from Norway who has visited her. He has a good teaching position in Oslo.</p>
6, side 1	<p>462: EXPERIENCES AS A PASTOR'S WIFE It helped her to attend Concordia and work for the Aasgaards. After they were married, the first call was to Glendive, Montana. They were there for seven years, a three-point parish with two churches in town and one in the country. He gave up the country church because it was too difficult to serve in the winter. Bertha had to take part in most church events, so she didn't have much time to herself. More was required of a pastor's wife then, than now: more entertaining, hostessing, and putting up other pastors. Pastors weren't paid much then. She also taught Sunday School and sang in the choir.</p>
6, side 1	<p>540: Pastor had a study in the home to meet with anybody who needed him. The last year they were in Montana, the congregation fixed a study in the church. Their son, Paul, was born in Montana.</p>
6, side 1	<p>553: NORWEGIAN TRADITIONS Cooking was mostly American because she hadn't done much Norwegian cooking. At home she helped with the goats and four cows, although she never liked the barn or the work. Since she was the youngest, she got away with less work and responsibility. She did take the cows to the "seter" [mountain dairy], and had just returned from there when the neighbor lady arrived. Bertha was never one to be afraid of adventure, and that's why she readily decided to emigrate.</p>
6, side 1	<p>588: She did some carding and spinning at home, but mother did most of that work. Bertha stayed with an uncle in a different town when she was about 14-16. Sister was two years older and had worked in Bergen for awhile.</p>
6, side 1	<p>608: After Montana, they went to California for five years where they had two or three churches in North Sacramento. [O.K. was in the First World War. Bertha was at Concordia at this time and didn't know him.] Then he joined the C.C.C. [Civilian Conservation Corp] and was up in the Sierras for two and a half years. Bertha stayed in Sacramento except for a short time when she and Paul lived in a mountain cabin. Paul was pre-school age at the time.</p>
6, side 1	<p>659: After California, they went to Bethlehem Church in Portland, Oregon, which was close to Laurelhurst Park.</p>

Container(s)	Description
6, side 1	<p>675: In 1922 (?), they came to Washington where O.K. had a church in North Tacoma. Pastor's wives in the beginning had to do more. She didn't always like the hostessing, but that's the way it was. She always had to have things prepared, and pastors didn't make much money with which to entertain.</p>
6, side 1	<p>708: Bertha was not active in PTA. She liked being at home because she could do as she pleased: fix up the place and take care of everything. She never was sorry she was a pastor's wife. She didn't work outside the home because of all her other responsibilities with the church. She simply didn't have much time free. Oftentimes, the parishioners called on her to head the women's organizations. There were usually two women's groups in church, one for the younger women and one for the older. She was involved with both. She felt she shouldn't--it wasn't her responsibility--but would get them started and then have other women take over.</p>
6, side 2	<p>023: At Concordia she stayed at the Aasgaard home. Mrs. Aasgaard was very nice, but firm. Bertha learned a lot and was very appreciative of the Aasgaard's. 067</p>
6, side 2	<p>067 : They lived through the Depression in Montana. A pastor earned about 100 dollars a month which had to pay for everything. During WWII, they lived in Portland. She's lived a long time, and wouldn't want to live it over again. You learned as you lived. It's different now with more schooling available to everybody. For instance, her nephew from Norway finished the four year program and is teaching in Oslo now.</p>
6, side 2	<p>155: O.K. always had to help the people; she helped him and furnished him with what he needed. In the women's groups, they had Bible study. Many people didn't have Bibles and didn't know the Commandments. Bertha had learned them at a very young age at home and in the Norwegian church. Her mother was interested in having the children study their lessons. She was more the disciplinarian than her father. They had the Catechism, etc., and recited them by heart. There were 64 in her confirmation class, a big congregation, and the Pastor didn't let anybody slip by either. They attended confirmation in the summer and school in the winter.</p>
6, side 2	<p>260: It was very different in Bible studies here; so were the teachers. She thinks children should have to memorize the catechism so it stays with them. She had her son learn like that.</p>
6, side 2	<p>303:</p>

Container(s)	Description
	She can still read and write Norwegian. Her son was never interested in the language. She and OK never spoke Norwegian at home. He came from northern Norway and had a slightly different dialect. She used nynorsk in school. He continued to use his Norwegian, but mainly for Christmas services. But his Norwegian goes slower now, because he thinks in English to speak in bokmål.
6, side 2	341: O.K. attends the Brotherhood here, but he has been too busy with church to belong to organizations. He had never belonged to the Sons of Norway. They just got away from those, and he worked so hard in the church. He is now retired, but still works--teaches Bible classes and preaches occasionally.
6, side 2	385 : Christmas baking is not too Norwegian; son doesn't like it. She never cooked much Norwegian food anyway. Paul does some of the cooking in his family; wife has worked part-time in past years.
6, side 2	412 : Speaking Norwegian. "Fader vår..."

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Depressions--1929
 Emigration and immigration
 Family--Norway
 Norway--Social conditions--1945-
 Norwegian-Americans--Northwest, Pacific--Interviews
 Norwegian-Americans--Social life and customs

Personal Names :

Aasgaard, Johan Arndt
 Davidson, Bertha--Interviews
 (creator)
 Davidson, Ole K. (O.K.)
 Davidson, Paul
 Østby, Asmund

Corporate Names :

Concordia College (Moorhead, Minn.)

Family Names :

Davidson family
 Østby family

Geographical Names :

Sacramento (Calif.)
 Glendive (Mont.)
 Moorhead (Minn.)

Østby (Norway)
Portland (Or.)
Tacoma (Wash.)

Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Occupations :

Housewives

Finding aid prepared by Kerstin Ringdahl and Amity Smetzler
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