

ED RAMSDALE

Interviewed by:

Sam Schragger

Oral History Project

Latah County Museum Society

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I. Index

EDWARD RAMSDALE

American Ridge; b. 1896

farmer

1.5 hours

minute page

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Edward Ramsdale

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with Sam Schrager

March 20, 1975

II. Transcript

SAM SCHRAGER: I first wanted to ask you about the name of the town you grew up in and where it was located in Norway.

ED RAMSDALE: Well I grew up a place they called. . . Well, you mean the real neighborhood where I grew up?

Well that was Ramsdale. That's the name of that. And then the nearest

shopping place where they had the store and a church and a school and where the steamers used to come in ^{on} the ocean they called Eikefjord.

And it was about seven English miles I think from Ramsdale down to Eikefjord Ramsdale was the last place in that valley. There was a valley went on through there and it went in two lakes. And the place where I came from was the last place, the end of the ^{road} right up again the mountain. There was a mountain right around like that.

SAM: Your last name is Ramsdale and that's the name of the place. Is that how it worked?

E R: Yes. that's how it worked. I might tell you about my dad. He came from a place they called Solheim . And his name was Solheim . But when he married my mother, my mother was an only child ^{there} and she inherited the farm there, you know, and then Dad, he changed his name from Solheim to Ramsdale. So still have that name of the neighborhood there. There was about four ^{farmers} there in that neighborhood with that same name.

SAM: That's how it works. Each neighborhood has it's own name and the people who live there have that name?

E R: Well, that is the way they had it in the old days. And now my brother there, ^{Elias,} he inherited the homeplace there and he had all girls. He didn't have any boys. So one of his daughter's got the homeplace that I grew up on. And she married a fellow by the name of Heshydahl . And then he changed

his name to Ramsdale when he married her. (Laughs) There's still Ramsdale there.

SAM: I guess that's how much more important the land is there than here because to have your name go by the land.. .

E R: Yeah, they really think a lot of their home farms--their homeplaces over there. It don't hardly ever go out of the family, very seldom. They try to keep it in the family. Some of 'em don't operate the land but still they keep it, just to keep it in the family. And it's hard to buy ^{any} land over there. There isn't hardly [^]anything for sale. And you never see any ads in the newspapers about land for sale or anything, very seldom. And last summer I was over there and the neighbor there, he kinda wanted to sell his place. He didn't have any kids or anything; he was gettin old. So I thought, 'Well, I'd like to buy that and ^{then} add it to the old homeplace and make it a bigger place.' But they have a law there--you gotta be a citizen of the country to buy land there. So I couldn't buy it.

SAM: How big was the homeplace?

E D: Oh just a small place. But ^{they} I have a lot of pasture land and wasteland in them mountains around there, but ^{the} cultivated land is just ^{patches}. What they had there, ^{is} around, oh eight, ten acres cleared ^{is} about all. And then they had milk ^{cows}. That's how they used to make ^a living ^{is} off of the farms back there, ^{you know}. They would grow hay ^{and} a few oats, and vegetables grow good there, like potatoes and carrots. All kinds of vegetables grow real good ^{there}. And then ^{the} hay ^{they} feed the cows and then sold ^{the} milk.

SAM: Where did they grow the hay with eight acres of. . . ?

E R: Well, they growed enough there to feed, oh--six or eight cows, somethin like that. Of course they cut some of the ⁺wild hay there too in the old days. They'd go up ^{there} on the slopes, you know, ^{and} on the mountains ^{and} cut wild hay, grass, put it up. That was good sheep feed. Everybody had a few sheep them days

too. ^{They} And had goats too when I left there, quite a few goats.

SAM: It sounds pretty much like the old days around here--the early days.

E R: Yeah. Similar, I guess, in the beginning here. We used to cut the wool off of the sheep there and they'd spin it and make cloth out of it, make thread and knitted socks and stuff, you know, out of the wool off the sheep. And the same thing, ^{maybe} we'd butcher maybe a cow ^{once in a while} or a younger animal, yearling. And we'd take the hide and tan that and make shoes out of it, ^{out of our own} leather. We got the bark off of the trees ^{there}, off of birch or ash, you know. And we used that bark for tanning the leather. Made our own shoes; I didn't have any boughten shoes until I come over to this country, made em at home.

SAM: Did it take a long time to tan leather and make shoes out of it?

E R: Not very long. Well, first ^{so} they let the hide dry, kind of. Then ^{we} took it out to an old kind of a pond they had there and ^{you} put the hide in the pond. And ^{you} let it lay there till the hair slips. It actually kind of starts to decay, you know, and the hair'll slip. And you get all the hair off of it. Then you put it in a wax, you know and put bark in there--you grind the bark. And then put it in there--I don't know how long they ha ^d the hide in there. Oh, probably a month or two.

SAM: What kind of a fit did you get out of a pair of shoes like that?

E R: Oh, good, real good. We had good shoes. Yeah, they fitted good. We'd measure the foot and make the last, you know. We just did the whole thing. ^{SAM:} So it had like a regular sole on it? E R: Oh, yes, yeah. We used wooden pegs, you know, for fastening the soles on, instead of sewing em on. Had them pegs about that long. ^{little one.} Throw them in, then you took a rasp on the inside and th ^{at} made it rough so they wouldn't slip out. They were good, tight shoes. They were water-proof. That leather was real good--it really held the water out. Of course, we had to grease it a lot, you know. Get the fat into it. Used grease off of ^{fat} y'know. We butchered a hog, and then we rubbed that grease into it.

Got it soft.

SAM: What kind of a house did you have there?

E R: Oh, we had a pretty good house. Yeah it was a, It was a pretty big house. We had a big living room and ^{and an} kitchen, ^{upstairs}. And then we had another living room that we didn't live in. You know in them days they had kind of a special room but they didn't live in it. And then ^{if you} got company or somebody stayin overnight or something then they'd put them in that room there, you know. That was for company. Kept it nice all the time, you know. Kids couldn't even go in there. (chuckles) I got a picture of the house here. (Pause) Yeah. That's my niece's daughter there, getting married. It's the wedding.

SAM: So it's right up against. . .?

E R: Right up against the hill that's covered with mostly birch. ^{timber} Some ash in there--mountain ash--but nearly all birch. It's nearly all birch in that neighborhood, like ^{the} Ramsdale there. There wasn't hardly any pine or anything. ^{Birch and some ash.} But way back sometimes there'd be ^{en} a lot of big pines there. ^{Because} ~~course~~, we found 'em way down ~~in~~ the ground--big logs--that big, thick. We used to dig big ditches that would drain some of them swamps, you know, ^{meadow} ~~many~~ swamps there. And we'd dig down maybe eight or ten feet, them ditches, and we'd run into them pine logs. ^{Pitchy} --yellow pine logs. And there wasn't one of them growin there now. Not a one. So there ^{been} really a change there some time or other.

SAM: Did you use the birch wood?

E R: Yes, we used that for firewood. And we used the bark for tanning leather. But you know birch's got two layers, you know--one ^{on the} outside layer, that thin stuff there, and then there's a thicker bark under there. Well, that outside layer, we used to make roofs out of that. That's the only kind of a roof we had when I was a kid. We'd take that off in the spring when it would slip, you know, ^{In the spring it would slip} when the tree started growin. ^{Then we'd} Take that off and we'd put it

in layers and lay it out flat like this. And then we put rocks on there to keep it flat in big piles. And that's what we used for roof (in the barn, in the house and everything. We'd lay that ^{on} there and then we'd ^{take soil,} slices of ^{and lay} sod on top of that to hold it down so the wind wouldn't blow it off. We had that on the house too. We had that on this house here but later they took it off and put that ^{rock} roofing on there now.

SAM: Did it last for ¹along time?

E R: Yeah, them roofs last a long time; oh, twenty, thirty years. Yeah, they were good roofs. Yep.

SAM: What about your water supply?

E R: We had a little spring out this way here that we got our water. You see that big rocks that that basement? SAM: Yeah. E R: I remember when they built this house; I was just a little kid then. I remember the old house we had. I don't know how old I was, about five probably--five years old when this house was built.

SAM: Where did the lumber for it come from?

E R: Well, down closer to the ocean there they had lots of pine forests, y'know. And that's where we got logs for the lumber. And this house here at the other house, the way they built them days they didn't have two by fours, you know, like they have nowadays. And there'd be a log about four inches ^{thick}, you know, and they just put one on top of the other and they cut off the ^{out} side of it and make boards out of it. So it was built out of four inch thick planks, you might say. That's how they built 'em. And then they put siding on the outside, boards.

SAM: When you were a ^{little} little boy there, what did kids do in Norway when they were growing up? Did they start school early?

E R: Yeah, we were startin seven years old. And we had school in homes then. We didn't have schoolhouse. And I got all that there, they had a school in private

homes. And ^{they wouldn't} have the school in the same home all the time; they would rotate it, y'know. Then they'd have it down a little ways in the valley there one year and next year maybe up farther, you know. There wasn't many kids there. I don't remember just how many we had to school there-- maybe thirteen, fourteen kids when ^I started school there. But then later on we built a new schoolhouse. So we all went to school there. But we only had terms of school. We'd have two weeks ^{of school} there in that schoolhouse. And then the same teacher, he'd go down, ^{farther down} in the valley and have his school two weeks down there, see. So we had two weeks and then two weeks between each term.

SAM: That doesn't sound too bad.

E R: No. (chuckles) But we had to do an awful lot of studying at home there. They gave us our lessons and we had to learn that at home by heart, y'know. When we came to school the next morning we had to know everything by heart. But in the first hour we generally had Bible history. We had a lesson in that that we had to know by heart. And then we had catechism. ^{Had to know that.} ^{We had class,} we had arithmetic and history, and then we had two hours a week singing practice. And then we ^{I don't know} had what they call that, you know, about animals and nature and all that, all that everyday. So we had pretty good school, really, yeah. It's one thing there ^{when we went to} school, we couldn't get by with anything. We really had to study and know our lessons.

SAM: Did they have a lot of books in this school? Books for the subjects or was it mostly just. . .?

E R: Each one of us had a book and we took the book home with us. We had our own book. Learned our lessons at home.

SAM: It was all the kids in one room just like the old schoolhouses here. [?]

E R: All the classes in one room.

SAM: What about play?

E R: Oh yeah, we had sports. We didn't have basketball or football or anything

like that but we had foot races and high jump and long jump and a lot of games, you know, we played in school. And we had tree planting every spring. The whole school got out for a couple of days and planted trees. That was quite interesting. Some of the trees that I helped plant when I was a kid in school, they ^{were} harvesting ^{I WAS} ^{when} back there. And that was kind of interesting.

SAM: Did you have any horses on the farm?

E R: Yeah, we had horses. ^{Generally} one or two, sometimes we had a brood mare and that ^{raise} a colt each year. We had horse and buggy; we used single horse to drive that, didn't use two horses like they did here. While some of em used single here too, y'know. But we only had one horse and a small buggy that we used when we went to town or to church ^{or} wherever we went.

SAM: When you were at home and not at school were you expected to work most of the time or could you play most of the time?

E R: Oh, we did a lot of playing. ^{I guess} Oh course, we had to work too when there was work to do. ^{Out in the woods.} We used to go up to them steep mountains ^{and they} had to drag you down by hand after quite a ways while gettin the firewood ^{until you could} get at it with a horse to haul it. And then in the summertime we'd cut that wild hay ^{back} ^{was up} in the mountains there. We packed it down, you know. We had a little building that we put it in, that most of our hay was packed in. ^{Put in that building} Kind of rough, you couldn't have it with a horse. So, we had our chores to do all right. But then we played a lot too, you know. Kids get together ^{And then we} and play and have games. We had young people's organizations, like I know we had a temperance organization ^{there} that I belonged to. And we had meetings and we had plays there sometimes, programs. So we had a pretty good time, really. Well, they had ^{that} here too when I came here first. We had a lot of home entertainments here, like we had parties in the wintertime; we used to go from house to house and have parties. And we had literary. We had that in

the schoolhouse. And we had plays there and a lot of things goin on. And then the ^{Bethel} Church down here. It was kind of a center for this community here, y'know. And we had choir down there; choir practice about twice a week. We had singing, and in the summertime we had picnics and made ice cream, I remember. We turned that old ice cream freezer a lot. And ^{make} that ^{home} ice cream, y'know. (Chuckles) That was really good, y'know- that homemade ice cream. Used to put ice and salt in there. Used to put up ice here in the wintertime.

SAM: Here?

E R: Oh, yeah. We cut them square off of the ponds or wherever you have water that froze. ^{MAYBE} You take and saw that ice into square blocks and then put it in the building and put sawdust all around it. And that ice would keep there pretty near all next summer if you put enough sawdust around it. It'd be ice there all summer.

SAM: I didn't know that they did that here.

E R: Yeah, we did that here. And that's the ice they used to use in ^{that} ice cream.

SAM: Would you do that in a group? Getting the ice?

E R: Yeah, most of the time a few of them went together. They used to work together quite a bit, you know, in the old days here. Like butchering, you know. Most of them would butcher in the fall. They'd butcher hogs. Most families butchered four or five hogs. And then they'd get together, see. Butcher hogs, and they'd do it all up in one day. Cut 'em up and salt 'em down. ^{Or} Sugar cure 'em and then rend the lard and make ^{the} sausage and all tift. Do it in one day, the whole thing.

The same thing about thrashing here. They helped one another, thrashing grain. Exchange work.

SAM: Do you think it was a lot like here the way it was when you grew up as far as cooperating?

E R: Quite a bit. Yeah, when I first came here it was quite a bit like the old country. Maybe a little farther advanced here than back there. It seemed like here, this country's always kind of been ahead of the rest of the countries. ^{Go ahead. ADVANCING.}
 And the rest of them, they'll finally follow. Like the automobile, you know, I think it first came here and then finally they got 'em everywhere now.

SAM: But it seems to me that there was such a small amount of land that you had there. It'd be hard to get ahead in your country.

E R: Well, it was hard to get ahead. People just made a livin--that's about all. Pretty hard to get ahead much. But it seemed like they had a pretty good living back there. They always had plenty to eat and we had clothes, you know, and everything. We got along all right, but didn't have any money hardly. Money was really scarce.

SAM: What was the town of Eikefjord like?

E R: Oh, it's just a small shopping place there. They had two stores, I think, where you could buy a few things. They didn't have many groceries in the stores them days, only ^{some} about flour and sugar, coffee and salt and pepper, a few spices and oh, a few more items. But they didn't have many varieties in the grocery stores, them days like they have now. And they had a church there. That's where everybody in that neighborhood went to church. There was only one church in the whole area there, you know, Lutheran church. And the steamers come in there. Brought the mail in there, and crates, whatever you needed and people, when they traveled they went by the steamers ^{or boats}. You went into a big town, you went into Eikefjord and you got on the boat and went to bigger cities. And they had a school there, too. Pretty good sized schoolhouse there in Eikefjord. And the graveyard--it was there in Eikefjord. And it was just a small place there. It's a little bit bigger now than then. They built a new school there. Now the whole valley goes down there to school. They followed the same as they have here. They consolidated ^{now} and they have bus ^{go to school} now. They all go down there to ^{Eikefjord}.

SAM: What was the herring run that you mentioned to me before?

E R: Yeah, yeah. That was in the spring of the year. . . (Break) (End of Side A)
 that's in Norwegian, *Klarsil*, you know, that's spring. And the spring herring
 run, it would start in the last January, ^{of} *during* February and March. And everybody
 used to try to go out on that to make a little money, you know. I went out
 two seasons. I was just a little kid, I was about fifteen years old, I guess,
 the first time I went out. And those schools, y'know, ^{of} herring, they come
 in to spawn in on the sandbanks on the shore there. And there was a lot of
 other fish, too, y'know, lived on the herring. Like whale, you could see the
 whale ^{of course} ~~at~~ there too, you know. But they wouldn't come in very close. But they
 were out there, ~~but they were out there~~. You could see 'em. And then the
 herring come in. Why, we'd surround them with a net, y'know, so they couldn't
 get away. ^{The boss of our} crew ^{it was} -- a crew of about twelve, I think. Each crew was
 just about twelve ~~men~~. And we lived on the boat. ~~And we lived on the boat~~. It
 was a skilboat. And the boss, he'd be up on the hill/some nights, you know,
 watching for these herring schools. ^{On} a clear night you can see the
 reflection on the sky, you know, from the herring. They come up fairly close
 to the surface of the water and it reflects on the sky. Something like the
 northern lights, you know. And he'd watch that reflection where they went,
 and then if they got in close to land some place, ~~he~~ thought he could get
 'em surrounded, why he'd hurry down and get everybody out of bed and out
 we'd go with that net and surround them. And then we had them. They couldn't
 get away.

SAM: How'd you get the nets around them? Did you wade in the water or did use
 the boats?

E R: No, rowboats. See the nets, you know, they have rocks in the bottom and

cork on the top. So you throw 'em out, they make a wall, y'know--one end goes down to the bottom and corks on the top holds it floatin so ^{it} won't sink. And then they'd get in touch with some of the buyers. ^{the}

times I was out there we sold the herring to Englishmen. They come in with the steamers there from England and we'd load 'em up with herring. They ^{id take} off; they put the herring in boxes. They had ice with 'em. So they used shovels. ^{to} They'd shovel the herring in and then a shovel of ice, ^{they} filled the box up. Some of them steamers ^{held} about two thousand boxes of herring. And a box would hold just about a barrel, I guess. But then we worked ^{night} and day till we got the boat loaded. ^{well} everybody got together then, too, you know. ^{when} the boat come in, ^{they} wanted to get loaded just as soon as possible on account of the ice would melt, I suppose. So you had to everybody get ^{it} and work, ^{then,} get the boat loaded. So that was quite a business them days.

SAM: What kind of a catch would you come up with in one run in a rowboat? With your net out?

E R: Oh, I think we had some catches there up to, oh, I'd say two or three thousand barrels, you know. Oh yeah, it was big schools come in there. Lots of herring. And once in a while we'd catch some cod, too, or other fish in there with 'em. One time out there, I ^{see} the herring and the fish come in, and they were so tight, they come up kinda on the shore there, ^{y'know, the tide,} the waves come in you know and then the herring come in. And then the wave go back out again and ^{they'd} lay there and kick in the sand there ^{on the bare ground.} That's how they were crowded up against the land there. And we went out in the rowboat there with hooks, y'know. And we'd hook a lot of codfish right out of the rowboat. They were right up on the surface, so tight in there, you know. Just packed in there. We'd catch 'em just with a hook.

SAM: Well, how long did this run last?

E R: Oh, ^{we} used to ^{have} around a month and a half, two months. The way they actually worked them, they started up in the northern part there earlier. ^T then later on they seemed like they moved south, and we'd move with 'em, you know. We'd go down south and maybe we'd catch another school down there. So we used to be out there for a month and a half, two months.

SAM: And you'd leave Eikefjord to go further south?

E R: Yeah, on a sailboat; we all lived on a sailboat. I'll tell you what kind of grub we had with us, we took a grub stake with us. We'd buy a whole barrel full of ^{hardtacks}, you know, or we call 'em . That's a dry toast made out of rye. But it'll keep, dry. So we'd buy a whole barrel full of that. And then we'd have a big slab of pork, maybe. And ^{maybe} we'd buy a sack or two of peas. We had lots of pea soup. That was a good dish them days back, pea soup with ham in it or pork. And then we'd cook mush, you know, and stuff like that. Had other meat too, with us, like beef, ^{and} We'd cook lots of potatoes, ^{maybe, and} vegetables, like rutabagas, ^{and} carrots. We had a whole supply with us right on the boat there.

SAM: And you just lived on the boat?

E R: Lived on the boat, slept on the boat and cooked there and eat there and everything.

SAM: And you were ready to go night or day when the fish came?

E R: That's right. We had to be ready to go any notice we got, had to be ready to go. Yep.

SAM: What happened if you didn't have a good wind when the fish came? You were finished?

E R: No, I think it was only once that we had to be tugged. ^{There was} fellows had tugboats, you know, to pull the other boats in case you did n't have ^{no} wind so you could move one place to the other. Why they had those little

tugboats that'd pull ya. That happened once, I think. We had to be pulled by a tugboat. We didn't have enough wind to sail. (chuckles)

SAM: Was the ship owned by one man?

E R: No, sometimes there was two or three or four of 'em in there, owned a ship.

And then of course the way the money was divided up: the boat got so big a share and then the owners, they got so much percentage, and then the common man

worker gets certain percentage of the catch. That's the way it was. So if you didn't catch anything, you didn't *get anything*.

But the first year, we *happened* to be lucky. I made a hundred and sixty *there* crowns.

And that was good them *days*, really pretty big money. I know fellows worked a whole year for less than that, you know. So it just depends on how the herring run was. That's what it hinged on.

SAM: Would that be about the best way a young fella could make money in that country then?

E R: Yeah, that was about the best. If you happened to be lucky, yeah. Because the wages there were really low. I knew a young fellow there, about my age, he worked there for my neighbor for a year and he was supposed to get a hundred crowns for a year's work. And then of course he got his board, a place to stay, and *maybe* he got a few clothes with it too.

SAM: What did this hundred crowns amount to then?

E R: Well, *in* American money, it amounted to about twenty-five dollars. Just about four crowns to the dollar them days. Yeah. Well, of course that's the reason why there were so many people immigrating over here them days, because the wages *(were)* so much better here than back in them home countries. That's the reason. We all heard about America, you know, how they got rich over here, got big wages and all that. Everybody wanted to come here. And them days, there was lots of work here too, you know. They were even advertising back there for labor, you know, the railroads and the big loggin companies

and all that. *They were advertising for labor back in the old country.*

SAM: No kidding, they advertised right in Norway for people?

E R: Yeah.

SAM: Did you ever see those advertisements when you were back there?

E R: Yeah, like the railroads, you know. They were building railroads here then and they need lots of men. They were advertising for men.

SAM: Well, in your people that you knew, who were the first ones who'd come over to this country from Norway?

E R: Well, the first one ^{that} I probably remember, that is my uncle, my dad's brother. He came over here, ~~but~~ I don't know what year it was, but it must have been in the 1800's. 'Course these *William* brothers here, Olson brothers, they come over before then. They had left there in 1865, ~~maybe~~, something like that?

SAM: They were from the neighborhood too?

E R: Well, they were from the other side of the mountain, fairly close, just over the hill there, about an hour or two's walk, I guess.

SAM: Well, then was it your brother ^{who} came over to the United States?

E R: Yeah, my brother was over here for five years before I came. He came back home before I left. See, I guess he was home ^{there} for a couple of years before I came over here. Yeah, he worked in North Dakota first, for a farmer. And then he went to Superior, Wisconsin, and worked for my uncle there. My uncle had a little grocery store there, in Superior. And my brother worked for him ^{there} as a delivery boy, ^{I think,} that delivered groceries. And then he came back home again and he got married and settled down. Stayed over there the rest of the time.

SAM: Back in Norway?

E R: Yeah. Well, he's the one that got the homeplace. He was the oldest one in the family so he inherited the old homeplace, you know.

SAM: Well, this was usual for people to come over and then come back?

E R: Yeah, ~~quite~~ ^{or} usual, yeah. A lot of them did that. Come over here and made

a ^{little} stake and then go back home again. Well, I had that in mind too, when I came over. Oh, yeah, I didn't intend to come over here to stay when I left over there, I just thought I'd come over here and make some money and stake and then go back home again, stay home. But I made my first trip home ^{that was} in 1920. And I kinda half-ways ^{was} decided to stay home but I couldn't find anything over there I liked to do. I didn't want to farm over there, ^{course} it was so hard to get into to anything anyhow. And you worked for wages and those jobs, they paid so little, I just kind of felt like it was a waste of time to stay there. So I decided to come back here again.

SAM: How far was Eikefjord from a city?

E R: Oh from Flora, oh, probably about twenty miles. That was the nearest town. That wasn't a big town either. But then Bergen is a bigger town, that's a pretty good sized town there. And that was about twenty Norwegian miles from where we lived. And that'd be /40 English miles, big city.

SAM: So the idea of going to the United States had a lot of influence or attraction on people as they grew up.

E R: Oh yes, it ^{really} did. There's a lot of people immigrated about the time I did. Just a lot of 'em, from all over, everywhere. Well, they had so many immigrants ~~come~~ over here that they had an immigrant train running from New York out west that had nothing but immigrants on it, it's a fact. There was an immigrant train that I got on when I come over here and we were all immigrants on that train to start with. And then of course as they went they kept unloading, you know, till you finally got down to a few, like that car I was in I remember, there was just two of us left--there was a girl and me. And I went over, I was wondering if I could talk to her, but I couldn't understand her; she couldn't understand me. She was a Russian girl. And we just kind of laughed at each other. (laughs) Yep. But those seats, you know, they didn't

have any cushions; ^{ever} they were two by fours. You know, we sat on two by fours.

(Laughs) Yeah, oh there was all kinds. ^{there was} An awful lot of ^{Finn} on that boat that I ^{came on} and there was a lot of Russians. An awful lot.

SAM: Did people really believe that they could get ahead in the United States, and that was the report that they'd had?

E R: Oh, yes. Definitely, yes. That's the reason why so many of them immigrated because they had heard they could make a lot of money over here, you know. High wages. Lots of work. Back there work was scarce too. Couldn't always get a job. (Break)

SAM: . . .you on coming over here? What made you decide to come here?

E R: Well, I decided that I had to get out and work; you couldn't stay home all the time. So I decided that I could make money a whole lot faster over here than ^{I could} over there so I thought I'd take a chance. Come over here.

SAM: Well, how did you wind up getting in contact with these Olson brothers?

E R: Well, they had a brother back there. His name was Olmika(?). He lived close to where we lived and so we got him to write over here and ask 'em if we could come here, if they thought we could get a job here, you know, and stuff like that. So we got an answer. They thought we could ^{get} work and we could come to them, you know, use their name. You had to get somebody here, some name to use that you'd come to here in this country. So we used their name and I came here.

SAM: Any reason you picked coming here instead of ^{to} Wisconsin or to where your uncle had been?

E R: Well, I kinda wanted to farm, you know, I kinda had that in my mind. And I went out fishing there one time, I didn't like to be on the water too good, so I thought I'd rather go for something else, you know, than be a sailor, you know a lot ^{to} Norwegians are sailors, you know. I thought I'd rather go to some kind of a land ^{job}.

SAM: Was it hard to get clearance to come to this country. [?] Is all you needed to

have someone to speak for you.

E R: No, that was easy. Oh, yeah. No problem at all. You didn't have to have any passports, anything. Just have a name here. Somebody to come to here. That's about all. Buy a ticket.

SAM: What was your trip like getting over?

E R: It took about three weeks. We went by boat to Bergen, and then we got on the steamer from Bergen to Hull, England. And then we took the train ~~over~~ from Hull ^{over} to Liverpool, across England. But we actually missed the boat that we ^{was} supposed to get on to come over on. I don't know whether we got delayed or somethin. We had to stay in Liverpool there for three days before we got on the boat to come over here. Otherwise it was a nice trip; nice weather, we were sittin up on the deck in the sun everyday, real nice. Ocean was just like a looking glass.

SAM: Sounds like you were luckier than some people who came over.

E R: Oh, we was real lucky there. Oh yeah, I've been across there when we never got on deck at all. Yep. And we stayed down under on the whole trip. Ocean was going over the deck everyday.

SAM: Did you tell me that you tried to start learning English when you were in Liverpool? Did you mention that?

E R: Well, yeah. Well, I and another neighbor kid there, you know, stayed together. And we stopped on a sidewalk there in Liverpool and a team of big horses pulled up there. They used to ^{freight} the horses behind the truck. We never seen ^{little} big horses like that back in Norway, we had them small fiordhest they called, you know.

SAM: Fiord hest

E R: Yeah, fiord hest.

SAM: What'd that mean.

E R: Well, fiord you know they have many fiords in Norway. And then hest, that's

horse, you know. So they named one after the fiords, I guess. Fiord fiord horse. They're a small^{er} type. Oh, they're something like Welsh, I guess, more like than anything else.

SAM: So these were big horses?

E R: These were great big Shires, you know, long hair and the legs. So we stopped there, and the guy got out and went in the store there so I said to my partner, "Let's stay here now and hear^e what he says when he comes back out to make them horses go, you ^{know}." So we stood there and waited until he come back out, and he got in his rig and he said, "Gidup," you know. And by golly, we caught that word, you know, and I kept repeating that over and over and over so ^{it stuck so} I wouldn't forget it. (chuckles) That was the first word of English I remember ^hat I learned. (chuckles) Yep.

SAM: What did you think? Did you come into New York? Is that where you landed?

E R: Oh, well of course we noticed that Statue of Liberty, there, you know. That's ^{more than} the first thing we noticed there, what a huge thing that was, yeah. Oh of course, we didn't get out then. They rushed us to the railroad, you know. Didn't get to see very much.

SAM: You came straight to here by railroad?

E R: Yeah, yeah, um hum.

SAM: You told me that Nick and John lived right over the hill here?

E R: Yeah, they lived in that cabin up there on the top there when I come over.

SAM: The one that you can see from here?

E R: Yeah, um hum. Yeah, that's where I first came to. Right up in that cabin. Too bad that went down. It should have been taken care of, I guess. No, when that was built there, it was built in two buildings to start with. 'Cause the line between these two homesteads went right through the middle of that cabin up there. And they left ^{it} open there until they got proved up. And then they built it together.

SAM: You mean they just joined the two houses.¹

E R: Yeah, just joined it together. Made it into one.

SAM: Well, when you got here, what happened then? Did they just put you to work?

E R: Yeah, I went out in the field and pitched hay the next day. Got here just in haying time and after. . . (END of Side B)

SAM: Would you say that again? When you got to Troy?

E R: Yeah, the conductor on the railroad, he came and put his hands on my shoulder, patted me on the shoulder, and said, "This is it." (chuckles) And even off the train, I could see he was walkin around me, he was tryin to find somebody that could talk my language, I guess. So found a fellow by the name of Alfred Sundell down there, and Alfred, he took me up in town, he could talk, well, he was Swedish, really, but we made out all right. Told him where I was goin and he said he'd see if he could find somebody from out there. And went up in that Olson Johnson store there, and he found Muslan he was in there with a team and a half. Mushlan, ^{he lived} right over in that house over there, the first house there. That's where he lived. So I got a ride out here with him right away. He took me right up there to Nick and John Olson there. Yep.

SAM: You and your friend had split up by then?

E R: Yeah, my friend, he got off in North Dakota. I think we separated either in Minneapolis or St. Paul. He got another train there. He stopped in North Dakota; he had some relatives there. Since then he's moved to Minnesota. Last I heard of him, he was up northern part of Minnesota, close to the Canadian border.

SAM: Well, do you remember just when this was?

E R: This was 1913. I came to Troy the twenty-second day of July, 1913.

SAM: Started pitchin hay the next day?

E R: Yep. I remember. Right out on that field out there. It was awful hot that day too,

I noticed that. (chuckles)

SAM: What do you remember the country being like when you were first here?

Do you remember what some of your first impressions of this country were?

What you thought of it?

E R: Well, I thought it was an awful big country for one thing. And really what I thought of it at first--I thought it was awful hot here, like in harvest here that year, pretty hot. And, oh my face got sunburnt and the skin was peeling off of my nose, all that. And anyways as far as the land was concerned, I really thought this was good land here. They could raise good crops without fertilizing--just plow and harrow it, you know, and seed and get good crops. We couldn't do that back there. You had to have that natural fertilizer on everything, you know. Otherwise you wouldn't grow anything much. And the way they had big fields they had here. I really thought this was a big country and big fields. Everything big, like the thrashing here- big thrashing machines, you know. And thrash a thousand sacks a day, you know. That was really something. Yep, but they didn't have hardly any automobiles here. As far as I remember ^{I think} there was only three automobiles in Troy when I came here. And the roads, of course, they were awful dusty here in the summertime. All dirt, no gravel on the roads them days. When you drove in a wagon the dust would fly, you know, all over.

SAM: Could you see a big difference between this country and the country further east?

E R: Well, of course, the hills here, you know. And the timber . Of course when we came through the Dakotas, well we came through Minnesota there too, part way, and that's all prairie you know like in Minnesota, I remember we ran for a long time just on the open prairie there. Oh course when you got out here you got into mountains and timber, rolling country. This is more like

the old country out here than back east, mountains and timber. And that's what we had back there. But I really thought this was really something here, the way it could produce. And the people here were really, ^{really} nice and friendly too, yeah. I remember I started going down to that church, ^{Bethel} church, you know. It wasn't hardly a Sunday ^{unless} somebody ^{would} ask me out for dinner, go home with 'em for dinner or something. They were really nice. Yeah, real nice and friendly. This was an awful good neighborhood here, when I came here. Well, it is yet as far as ^{that's} concerned. Yep.

SAM: How did you get on with Nick and John?

E R: Oh, all right. Yeah, I stayed there for a long time. And then I finally got to rentin some of Nick's land. I ~~farmed~~, ^{they had} a place way down, about three miles down the canyon down there. And I farmed that for fifteen years. I first started farmin up here a little bit, yeah. They were pretty good guys, you know. I was just nothing but a kid, you know. And they put up with me, I guess. When I think about it now, you know, and the way ^I start out you know, just seventeen years old--just a kid. I can't hardly believe it.

^{Packing,} Packin and going away from home that young. (chuckles) But I was stubborn, I was bound to go.

SAM: Did your parents try to talk you out of it?

E R: Oh my, yes. Oh yeah. They really did.

SAM: What about learning English?

E R: Well, I don't know--it was the first or the second winter I was here, why Nick and John, of course we talked Norwegian pretty much up there. And they said "you'll never learn English around here; ^{said} "you gotta get out someplace where they ^{he says} tak it. "Otherwise you'll never learn the English." So then one winter I went over here, a fellow the name of Cunningham, he lived over there just a little ways. He had a farm over there. He had two or three kids. He was a retired schoolteacher. They were both schoolteachers. And I think Nick had talked to him

something about it. And Cunningham said, "Well, come over here this winter. You can work a little. We'll give him his board and stay here and work a little bit, and cuttin' ^{some} wood and milka few ^{cows}, chores." So I went over there and then I went to school there about, I don't know, after Christmas anyhow. I think it was about six weeks. I think that was all the school they had after Christmas, about six weeks. Didn't have the long terms they got now. So I went to school there then. From Christmas and on till the end of the term. And I stayed there. I learned quite a bit of English that winter.

SAM: You learned at the Cunningham's house?

E R: Yeah, well, going to school and Cunningham's house. And he had a boy, you know, who was about ten years old, and he was always talkin to me, you know, and I probably learned more from him than anybody else. Because I went out and he'd seem like he'd always be with me, and he'd be talkin and I felt more free around him, ^{I know, too,} to talk. So I learned a lot from him. So that spring, I was gettin so then I could understand everything. I couldn't talk it but I could understand everything that people told me or talked to me about. And then it gradually comes ^{where} if you're around ^{where} you hear it a lot, why it gradually comes. 'Course I really never studied English language like I should have. I should have studied it more so a fellow gets so he can talk more correctly, ^{I guess,} but I just. . . What I picked up from other guys.

SAM: You're talkin fine. I think if you tried learning it in a book it'd be worse.

E R: Think so? (chuckles)

SAM: I wouldn't know hardly than you hadn't been born and raised here because there are alot of people, you know, who were raised speaking Norwegian or Swedish and then when they started school they'd learn. And you talk just as well as anybody.

E R: Oh, I don't use good grammar many times. I notice it myself when I listen to somebody and how they say it, you know. My grammar isn't good. (chuckles)

SAM: Well, I don't know about that. Well, it must have been unusual when you were in the school in the winter because you must have been about the oldest or one of the oldest students there.

E R: Oh, yeah, I was way the oldest in the school, yeah. I started in in the first grade. Trout, he lived on the corner there, in that house there, and he had a boy that just started school that year, you know. So him and I started together. ^(chuckles) But I picked it up pretty fast. I got into the sixth grade before I got through there, yeah. Of course, arithmetic and lot of stuff I already had, you know. It was the language. Spelling was really the most difficult to learn, ^{still is}. I had a terrible time to write and spell correctly, ^{That takes a lot of studying, you know, to spell right.}

SAM: Yeah. But you can probably read fine.

E R: Oh, fine, yeah I get along fine reading, yes.

SAM: So you got to meet a lot of the local kids when you. . .

E R: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I met all the kids. Oh, I got along good in school. We had our snowball fights and everything. They all wanted to be on my side because I threwed a little harder than the rest of them! ^(chuckles) Yeah, I remember that. "I want to be on your side!"

SAM: You were probably as big as the teacher.

E R: Oh, yeah. Just about I guess. Yeah, her name was Mohundro. Hazel Mohundro was her name. It was a girl teacher. Yeah, all the neighborhood kids went to school there.

SAM: Was this the first winter that you were here?

E R: I'm not sure whether it was the first or the second. I believe it was the first winter, yep. Yeah, I'm pretty sure it was the first winter.

SAM: Well, how did it work with Nick and John? Did they board you and you worked for them? Or how did that work? How long did that go on?

E R: Well, I worked for em off and on, not steady since I started farmin. I started

farmin the third year I was here. But I didn't work for them steady, but I kinda made that my headquarters there, you know. But I worked for neighbors around there. But Nick had a lot of livestock, you know: horses and cattle. So in the wintertime there we had to feed all them horses and cattle, and haul ⁿmaure. I remember one winter I hauled manure there, I don't know, over a month. I covered a whole field out there with ^hmanure one winter from all them horses. We had a lot of ^{had}piesthat piled up, you know. Trying to get it all cleaned out once. Pitch it down, you know; haul it on a sleigh, team of horses. And then they stayed. . . Sometimes they hauled the grain in from the thrashing machine, haul it in buildings. Then haul it to town on a sled in the winter; it was so much nicer to haul on a sled than in a wagon. So some winters we'd haul grain for a coupla, three weeks, you know, on sleds.

SAM: Just into Troy?

E R: Yeah, um hum. Sacks, you know. Everything was sacked them days. When they had a big building up there, big granary, we just piled a lot of grain in there, haul it right in from the thrashing machine and pile it in. I remember we used to make stairways out of sacks. We used to stack sacks up like that, you know. You could get way up high, pile it up.

SAM: They were living in the two room cabin then?

E R: Yeah. They hadn't built the house then. The house there was built in 1920. I remember that for sure 'cause that's the year I went back to Norway.

SAM: So it was probably pretty primitive then with a wood stove and a . . .not much in the place at all.

E R: No, no, not much. Very little. Just a stove, they had cookstove, maybe a heater. And a few chairs and table. Didn't have much luxury them days.

SAM: Did you have a bedroll or something like that for your place to sleep?

E R: Yeah. Them days, you know, when we went in harvest we slept out. We had a

cookhouse along with the machine that thrashed. Then we'd just move from one place to the other, and we'd sleep in the straw stack; everyone had their bedroll to sleep in. So we'd just make our bed in the straw pile in the evenings. That's the way we lived in harvest. That was fine, too, as long as the weather was good. But if it got to raining at night we all had ^{then} to get up and run for the barn or someplace, get under a roof.

SAM: Well, what was the first ^{that you did} farming of your own instead of just working out for other people.

E R: Oh, the first land I rented was ^{Clemm} that forty down there where Lester lives. And I growed beans then; I put it all in beans. And that's the way, we growed a lot of beans ^{around there} them days, we didn't grow any peas. It was all beans and wheat and oats and ^{some} barley. We generally had some of our land in beans and then they put the bean ground into fall wheat in the fall. That was the rotation they had here then instead of now they have peas and then put the fall wheat on the pea ground or ^{fallow} some of 'em straight summer. So the first crop I growed was beans--white beans, white navy beans. And we planted them in rows and cultivated them. Then we cut 'em ^{they had} with a bean cutter with two knives. It kinda went a little bit under the ground, cut the beans off, and they come out in a row behind. Them knives, about this much space behind and then the knives come in and the beans would kind of slide back on the knife and drop off the end back there. Then we'd shock 'em with a pitchfork, put em in little shocks. When you thrashed 'em, why you pitched them shocks into the bundle wagons, you know, ^{then} and all the men thrash in stationary rigs. So there was a lot of work to beans. But they were a pretty good crop them days. And it was good ground for the fall wheat because you cultivated that ground in the summer and kept it clean from weeds, and then you held the moisture too, by cultivating. So the wheat done real good on the bean ground.

SAM: Who was it you rented the place from?

E R: Ike Sly, that first one, yeah.

SAM: Did you have money to go into the business at that time?

E R: Yeah, I worked for two years there and I saved up five hundred dolllars.

And that's when I bought my equipment, what little I bought with the five hundred dollars that I saved up. Bought a team of horses, and a wagon, some herd. I bought a little hay and some oats, feed ^{for} horses.

SAM: What were your wages during those two years that you saved five hundred dollars?

E R: Well, I made, oh, between three and four hundred dollars a year as I remember, so I had a little spending money. And I didn't spend much.

SAM: I don't think so.

E R: Just what I had to, you know. But anyhow out of the two years work I saved up five hundred, and I don't know how much the gross was, not over seven, eight hundred dollars.

SAM: Do you remember what the wages were for the work you were doing then?

E R: Yeah, in harvesttime we got two and a half a day, thrashing, you know.

And for plowing and field work: seeding and harrowing and plowing, we got a dollar and a quarter a day. And in haying, I think we got two dollars a day pay. And then we got our board; the working ^{MAN} generally stayed at the place where they worked and they got their board, room.

SAM: So you sort of stayed with Nick and John when you weren't workin out, and then you'd go out and work for other people in season.

E R: Yeah, sometimes I 'd kinda come back there, and I stayed there. One year I went harvestin over in the Genesee country. I took a team and a wagon over there and hauled ^{for} harvest. But that was after I started farmin, though. After I started farmin I still went out and worked, you know, once in a while. Like in harvest. And that was the main income of a lot ^{of} the working fellows around here them ^{days}, you know, was to go out and harvest. Get a good run in harvest and they'd save up enough money to carry 'em over maybe.)

next winter.

SAM: You were saying there wasn't too much money in the farming itself? then

E R: No, there really wasn't. But about the time I started, you know, things got better, you see. That was when that First World War started and the prices went up. Like the prices on beans went up, you know, quite a bit. So farmin got better there for a few years. So it was pretty good if a fellow would have had the land then, he could have done pretty good. But I just had little patches, you know. I didn't really make anything, but I done better than working for wages though. Of course, I could still work out part time. And I come out better by farming a little and then worked out a little too, than if I'd a just worked out.

SAM: What year was this first bean crop you put in? Do you remember?

E R: That was in--let me see, that was the third year I was here. That'd be '16. That's it. That's the year I had beans over there in Ike Sly's place, 1916.

SAM: How did you come out?

E R: I come out pretty good. When I sold my beans that fall I got ^{around} five hundred dollars for 'em. So I got my money back, you know, I put in. But I really spend all the five all right. I didn't have enough ^{really} to go through that whole year. I got my bean crop, though. So I got Olson, talked to Olson and Johnson down here in the store, you know, if I could charge my groceries ^{there} until I got my beans harvested. And they let me do that. And that was done a lot them days. It seemed like the store, they carried the farmers from ^{maybe} spring to fall till they got the harvestin done, the crops sold.

SAM: Did you figure they would carry you?

E R: Well, I didn't know. I was a stranger and all that. I didn't know if they would or not, but I thought I'd ask 'em anyhow. And they agreed to do it, yeah.

SAM: This was the year of the first crop?

E R: Year of the first crop, yeah. So then it went on and I gained a little each year. Farmin was pretty good there for a few years. And then later on, why it got tough again after 1920. It was hard to make any money farmin then for a long time, really. After the First World War, why the prices really went down; they dropped, you know. But then I bought a thrashing machine ^{a little} there later on. So I thrashed around this country here--custom thrashing. So I made a little money on that thrashing machine. I got enough money ^{from the bank} to buy that rig. That was Ole Bohman. He was the president then, he was the man that started the First Bank of Troy. That was before Brocke came in there. So I went down there and asked him if I could get some money to buy a thrashing machine. He kind of stared around a little bit and "Yeah," he says, "I believe I'll let you have it. You've got a chance to make some money with a thrashing machine. But if you come in here and wanted to buy a new car I wouldn't let you have it." (chuckles)

SAM: Yeah, something ^{important}. Something that could make something for you.

E R: Yeah, that's right. There was one thing about that bank; I never had to give them a mortgage or anything. ^I always got the money I needed on my note and never asked for a mortgage on anything I ever had.

Transcribed and typed by Kathy Blanton