

Olaf Swensson Collection
Florence Olson Interview
June 3, 1975

Today is June 3, 1975, and I am at the home of Joe and Florence Olson, in Granite Falls, Minnesota. My name is Carol Swenson and we will be discussing their reminiscences of the Olaf Swensson family.

(short blank section on the tape) Mrs. is speaking on the tape, when not otherwise noted.

Mr: Oh I'm sure he could. Mrs: He could remember, because, I suppose they went over there. Mr: Oh yes, yeah. Mrs: And he'd remember the man better. I remember the man would play on the harp, you know and sing to us kids.

Q: They had a harp?

Ya, he had a harp.

Q: A...a...

No, just one of these little ones you'd lay on the table.

Q: Oh.

And then he'd harp away, you know, and sing.

Q: He would sing hymns then, or...

Yah, yah. Um hm, he was awful good to sing.

Q: How far away did you live, you know the...

Oh, oh we lived on my brothers farm, now. It's along highway 212, and we lived there. That's where I really grew up, but I was born on my other brothers farm. The house that your Dad was born in. And that wasn't too far from Swensson's.

Q: I see. Then how did you come to stay there in the summer all the time? We'd go there and stay and go to Bible School. The Sparta Church was the first to start these here Daily Vacation Bible Schools. And now they have them all over. You know, they're having Bible School in the Lutheran Church, now, this week in Granite.

Q: What sort of things did you do at Bible School?

Well, we had Bible Stories and we'd color and we'd make things. We'd make things, kind of...oh posters and different things; kind of like kids make in Bible School. And then we always put on a program after Bible School. We memorized alot of Bible Verses.

Q: How long did it last, your Bible School last? How many days?

We'd have it two weeks...always. Just in the forenoon. But then we'd stay there all summer, you know, we'd stay on. We didn't only go for Bible School, we'd stay on there.

Q: And then you'd help out then during the summer?

Yes. We'd help with different things. We played and there was a family by the name of Winge. To get on the main road, they'd have to go through Swensson's yard and on Saturday night, well they had a girl about my age and on Saturday night they'd go to town. You know, that was the trend years ago, to go to town on Saturday night. And they'd drive through the yard there, and they'd be going to town on Saturday night and then I felt so bad because we had to stay home, you know, out to Swensson's there. It was kind of like a big prison.

Q: (laughter) Did the girls go to town much?

No. No, not much. We used to have picnics down...they called it the Sandberg Pasture. We'd have Sunday School Picnics and stuff like that.

Q: And where was that?

It was more along the river, wasn't it Joe, kind of...Mike Sandberg?
Mr: No, it was just a creek there, Palmer Creek. You were going to Palmer Creek. Mrs: Oh, oh ya. And I was baptised in the river, below Matt Swensson. That's a relative of the Swensson's. They went to the Sparta Church. And we were baptised in the river, on a Sunday afternoon.

W: Did Olaf come to many of the Church functions then or did he usually stay home? Can you remember him coming?

(143-5 min.)

No. I don't know why he never... Mr: Well, ya, but I think your best bet would be Jake Nygaard and Alfred Nygaard and Emil Anderson. Because they lived neighbors right in there. Ya, but of course, like none of them ever belonged to the church. Mr: No, I know, but then they were, you know, they knew what, everything went on there. Oh ya. You see the old man Swensson, he was sort of a minister himself, you know.

Q: Yeah.

Mr: I think he, I don't know for sure, but it seems to me, like he had sort of a religion all his own, you know; what he preached. Ya. And then of course at one time he ran for Governor.

Q: Do you remember anything about that, or...remember hearing any stories about that?

Mr: No, I don't remember. No. Here it says.....once he ran for the office of Governor, and though defeated, from that time on, bore the nickname of Governor. Mr: Ya, but I'm sure that Emil or Jake; see Emil and Jake I suppose, and Alfred, they're all about the, you know, pretty close to the same ahe there and I would think that either three of them would remember. Even the time when Olaf Swensson was running

for Governor.

Q: Um hum.

I have some snapshots that were taken in the Swensson house, after John and Emma died. It was Edward Nygaard that took these snapshots. And, I don't know where I'd have them now, though.

Q: What were...

I better look in here. What were you going to say Carol?

Q: Do you remember anything, you know, like what John and Emma and Christine were like? You know, as far as, kind of personality wise?

His personality?

Q: Yeah.

Well, he was always so good to us kids, you know, he...

Q: What were you going to say Joe?

The Swensson's, they, like the girls, Christine and Emma and John, and them, they were good-hearted people. Mr: Ya. Very. They had a nice personality.

Q: Well, it seems so, kind of strange, to me that he was, you know, that he was such an industrious person. He was always, you know, busy doing stuff-that no one of the children ever really carried that on, that...

Mr: No. Of course John wasn't too good a farmer, you know. No. He always got his crop in about three, four weeks late. Ya. And he'd get lost in a book. He enjoyed reading. He loved to read, where he should have been out tilling the soil, or getting the crop in, he was busy reading a book. But he was a smart man, though. That is, he was a well read fellow. Ya. Because he did alot of reading.

(245-10 min.)

Q: It's just that his interest was...

But he should have never been a farmer.

Q: Yeah, his interests weren't in that area.

No. If John could have only gone on to school, he would have probably made the White House. Mr: Well, I wouldn't say that. He was a brilliant man, but he had no business trying to farm. He was no farmer.

Q: Do you remember Katie, at all.

Ya.

Q: Do you know, like it always seems like she was-took the more, the, did alot of the mans work, around the house, you know, like helping her

father with the stones and stuff. Do you know why that was? Why she was, you know....

Well, she was the oldest, for one thing. And I wonder if Katie just wasn't kind of a little closer to her Dad. He probably felt the same way, being the first born, sometimes is kind of a favorite. Katie was a very hard worker, having helped build the house.

Q: Yeah, I see. Did she go to town more than the rest of the kids, then too, or...

Well, I know one thing, they never missed coming to town the day we had voting. They always were very faithful, casting their vote.

Q: They were quite interested in the community then, and what was going on?

Ya. Ya. They didn't have radio or television and alot of times they were without a telephone. And I know one time John said, that he lived in perfect bliss.

Q: What sorts of things did the girls and Mrs. Swensson do around the house?

Christine really did most of the work. Emma was kind of poorly in health. She had been a patient of Moundsvew Sanitarium and she was always kind of a little more frail than Christine, And Emma kept the house clean, neat and clean; dusted and they had alot of plants. She'd take care of the flowers and water the plants. Christine did the cooking and she'd help John outside too. Ya.

Q: Did she do, like the weaving and the spinning, most of that work?

Christine did rug weaving, alot of rug weaving, whenever anybody brought rags to her, to weave, she did that. And they did alot of fancy work and crocheting. They had chests of all that stuff, because I saw it, I knew they had it, and whatever happened to that is a mystery. One man even asked one time, we were out to Swensson's, and he said, whatever happened to all that fancy work and crocheting and that, and he didn't know what to answer.

Q: Maybe it got sold in the auction or something like that.

No. It's uh...(no sound on the tape)

(347-15 min.)

Q: I remember when, well I went down with Grandpa and Grandma once, to the house, when John and Emma were still alive, and I can remember that everytime Grandma said that we went, that she would come and visit, they would always have her pick something out. That it was always something that they would do, a custom, sort of. When you came, you always got a gift from them, something that they used to do. Do you remember them doing that at all, or...

Well, they would give away alot of nice things that they had made, too, you know, but...I don't know. They had long evenings, you know, where they would be home all the time and work and stuff like that.

Q: Do you know how he got most of his money, or how he supported himself, other than the farm? Did that seem to yield alot of money for him, or...It seems that the house cost alot of money to build and you know, and if they were going to send away for all this stuff that they had...

Well, that far back, things were lots cheaper, you know. The house really, compared to building a house in our day, it didn't come to anywhere near what, if you should build a house today. You know.

Q: Yeah.

They had alot of flowers and kept the yard up nice and they seemed to enjoy nature. And Christine had a hobby, where she caught butterflys. We'd go off with Christine and she'd have a net, a cone-shaped net on stick, and we'd catch butterflys and then she'd have many, many butterflys. She'd spread them out on a board and she'd have them in boxes. They were just beautiful. And then in the boxes, with the butterflys she'd lay cigarettes here and there. That would preserve them.

Q: They didn't smoke though, did they?

No, no.

Q: She bought cigarettes to...

Ya, ya, she got cigarettes to keep in the boxes with the butterflys. It seemed like there was something in-about that tobacco that would help preserve the butterflys.

Q: Hm. You were saying earlier that you used to sleep off in those small rooms off the library there. Did they ever talk about having foreign students come over? Did you ever hear anything?

Ya, they'd have-we'd have conference there. They'd fix that big hall upstairs and serve dinner.

Q: This is for the Ladies Aid?

To, to...people would come from far and wide. It would be kind of the national or state conference. They'd have it at Swensson's hall.

(430-20 min.)

Q: For the Laides Aid?

For the Church.

Q: And where would they be housed, then, all these people?

Well, wherever they had room to keep them overnight.

Q: In the community, they would kind of spread themselves out?

Ya, ya. Uh hu.

Q: Did the women from the church then, cook for these affairs?

Yes, uh hu, ya. The food was made and cooked there is the kitchen downstairs and then they would carry it up the back stairway and serve it upstairs. And they did wome cooking upstairs too, but most of it was cooked downstairs.

Q: And then the girls kind of supervised that, or...

Yeah, the whole Laies Aid.

Q: The whole Laides Aid?

Yeah. At one time the Sparta Church was quite, active and going good, going pretty strong.

Q: What kind of social things do you remember then, doing? Did he = disapprove of dancing and that sort of things, or...

Dancing?

Q: Yeah.

No, I don't think they ever danced. I don't think they ever....

Q: Did they ever have any social events or anything?

Christine played the organ, you know, just one of these organs that you paddle with your feet and they had a couple, two, three organs in their home, and she'd always play the organ and she was organist at the church, always. I know we'd stand around the organ and sing. We'd get ready for Childrens Day programs and Christmas Programs. Emma always had charge of the Christmas Program. She'd send out our peices in the mail. We always called them pieces and we'd memorize them and then we'd have a Christmas Program. That was a big night and we learned our pieces and then they had a Christmas tree, with candles on and they'd light the candles on the tree at the Program. And then people would bring presents and after the program was over, the presents were passed out and then they'd pass out candy and peanuts and they'd eat the peanuts and put the peanut shells right on the floor, and you should have seen the way the floor looked after everybody left the church. They just had a good time.

Q: (laughter) This was at the church?

Yeah, I remember that.

Q: What else did you do for the program, besides have the memorized pieces? Did you like sing songs and...

Well, ya, we'd all sing and we'd go up there and speak, you know, and then we'd come down.

Q: Did everyone always get new dresses like they do nowadays?

Ya. We got new dresses and we really dressed up for that one night, when we went and spoke our pieces. We had one man in church named Andrew Arneson, he was a little hard of hearing. He said one time to me, he said he always enjoyed hearing me speak, because he could hear me. (laughter) And I always remembered that. I always have had, you know, spoken loud, so they could hear me.

Q: You mentioned before that John did alot of reading. Did he usually get his books from the public library, or did they send away for the, or did they buy them, or...

(514-25 min.)

Well, he had the Geographic Magazine for one thing, and I think they kept that for years, the Geographic Magazine. And they had alot of books of their own, and he'd buy books. Mr: Well, back in those days the libraries were far between, you know. Mrs: Ya. They didn't really have libraries. Mr: They didn't have these libraries and they probably would have had small ones. Mrs: I think he'd send for books and stuff like that. John was single. He never got married. I know, they boarded a teacher, one time. She was a single girl, kind of an older girl, too, teaching in their school and then one time we were out there and we were kidding John, probably he'll get her. And he said, I can't afford to by shoes for myself. (laughter)

Q: Well didn't his father really discourage his children from being married, or from getting married?

Ya. That one was married. Their daughter Martha.

Q: Yeah.

She's the only one that got married.

Q: Do you know why he did that?

Well, I don't know. He probably just didn't care for them to get married.

Q: Did they ever have, do you remember them having any like sweethearts or anything?

Well, no. Well, Emma, had a kind of an imaginary boyfriend, at one time. I don't know if he knew anything about it, but she imagined, he was... and she said she was going to get married. So my youngest sister, Martha, Emma bought her some pink organdy material and she wanted Martha to be her flower girl. At the wedding. Well, we got the dress made for Martha and she wore it out, and there never was any wedding. So I don't know if Emma really had a boyfriend or not.

Q: What sort of...did you ever play any games with them, when you stayed?

Games, oh ya, they were alot of fun. Well, I know one time Martha said the word jiffy; I'll make this in a jiffy, and then Emma said, you mustn't use that word. That isn't a nice word. (laughter) She should hear the language today. (laughter) Martha still mentions that, you know. The word jiffy. I'll make it in a jiffy.

(583-30 min.)