

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project
Interview with Ole Jennestad
October 20, 1979
317 1st, Sandpoint
Interviewed by David Barton
Questionnaire Information

OJ = Ole Jennestad
DB = David Barton

Tape 4; Side 1

DB: ...Norway...
OJ: Wisconsin, I came from Wisconsin...a little town south of
La Claire.
DB: How do you spell that?
OJ: S-T-I-O-N No, S-T-I-U-N.
DB: S-T-I-U-N. When were you born?
OJ: In October 21, 1885. And, tomorrow is my birthday.
DB: Oh, wow. Happy birthday.
OJ: That was 94 years ago.
DB: What town were you born in, in Norway?
OJ: Well, it wasn't any town, it was kind of a place.
DB: Where was it close to?
OJ: Close to Sortland. S-O-R-T-L-A-N-D. It was just seven
kilometers from Sortland.
DB: And when did you move from Wisconsin to Washington?
OJ: In 1903. In the Fall.
DB: What town did you move to there?
OJ: To Billingham. I was just looking for work, there was no
work there, and finally I got a job in Tacoma. I was
piling lumber there.
DB: What were you doing, when you were in Billingham?
OJ: I wasn't doing anything, I just looked around. And then I
left.
DB: When you say piling lumber, what kind of work was that?
OJ: That's building up lumber piles 20 feet high.
DB: Was it in a mill?
OJ: Well, it came from the mill, yes.
DB: Now, about your family. Did your parents, or any other
relatives move to America with you, when you came?
OJ: No, no. I was the only one.
DB: I see.
OJ: I was 15 and one half years old.
DB: Since then, have any of your family moved to America?
OJ: Yes. My brother came two weeks...two years after I did.
DB: I see. Where does he live now?
OJ: He's dead. He died in 1913.
DB: OK. Where ah...how large is your family now, that you have?
OJ: Well, I have just two daughters now. My wife died in 1970.
DB: Where do your two daughters live?
OJ: One lives in Seattle, and one lives here. Each of the
sisters has two daughters. They're both married; they live
in Seattle.

DB: When did you move to the Panhandle area, of Idaho?
OJ: Well, I came back from Tacoma, Washington, in the Fall of 1905, I think it was. Yes, Spring of 1905.
DB: What brought you to this area?
OJ: Well, I heard about, they told me that lumber piling was here. The Humbird Lumber company. There was a big mill just a half a mile from town.
DB: Is that the Tolbert?
OJ: They are not in business anymore.
DB: How do you spell the name?
OJ: Humbird. H-U-M-B-I-R-D.
DB: What did your father do for a living in Norway?
OJ: He was a tailor.
DB: A tailor. And did he do anything else? Did he do any farming?
OJ: Yes. He had a little farm. He had three cows and horse, and about 12 sheep.
DB: Who would he tailor for?
OJ: Everybody. He used to go around to the homes and stay there and make up clothes for all the people there.
DB: How many people lived in the community at that time?
OJ: Well, probably a dozen families.
DB: Did you ever do any tailoring yourself?
OJ: No. No, I worked in the store. I worked in the general store there; for 18 months before I came over here.
DB: When you moved to the Panhandle for the first time, where did you live here, in north Idaho?
OJ: Well, I lived in Sandpoint.
DB: Do you remember the address?
OJ: Well, no. I came here from Tacoma expecting to get a job piling lumber for Humbird Lumber Company. They were all filled up. Then there were five others, young fellows like me always looking for work. We heard about Vay, Idaho, there was a sawmill there.
DB: How do you spell that?
OJ: V-A-Y. It is called Valley now, I think. Anyway Vay, Idaho. We got job to pile lumber for the Brooks Lumber Company. They are not in business now.
DB: How long did you work there?
OJ: I worked there all summer. And next summer I got a job to work for Humbird.
DB: The big mill here, what kind of work did you do, in the piling?
OJ: I took 2-by-4, I took 2-by-8, 2-by-6, they were all 16 feet long, mostly. And you just piled it in piles about 20 feet high.
DB: You say that your father was a tailor. Did he keep the record of people's clothes in a little book, or how did he keep the information?
OJ: That I don't know. I don't know about that.

DB: You don't know. What neighborhood in Sandpoint did you live in, when you first moved here?

OJ: Where did I live?

XF: 700 block, I suppose on Fourth, wasn't it?

OJ: Yea.

DB: 700 block on Fourth Street?

OJ: In those days it was called Milltown, it was owned by Humbird Lumber Company.

DB: Were all the houses pretty much the same?

OJ: Yea, very close.

DB: Could you describe what your neighbors were like? What kind of people your neighbors were?

OJ: (Mumbled)

DB: What kind of nationality were they?

OJ: I don't think there were any Norwegian, that I know of. Except I had a partner, he was Norwegian.

DB: Were there Swedes there?

OJ: There were some Swedes and some Norwegians.

DB: Swedes and Norwegians. You say you had a partner. What do you mean by that?

OJ: Well that, it takes two to pile lumber. His name was Charlie Nelson, he's dead many years.

DB: Do you remember any neighbors who lived in the Milltown area? Any of their names?

OJ: Well, Miss Sund. Mrs. Anja Sund. She's dead now.

XF: That's S-U-N-D.

DB: What did she do?

OJ: She just had a boarding house. She boarded--men--there.

DB: Did you ever live in a boarding house?

OJ: Yes. It was a very good boarding house. Good food.

DB: Did she do the cooking?

OJ: Yes.

DB: How many men would live in a boarding house, at that time?

OJ: Oh, about half a dozen

DB: Half dozen. How many rooms were in the house?

OJ: Oh, there were seven rooms, I think. The house is still there now. They remodeled it.

DB: How many men were in a room? Did you each have separate bedrooms?

OJ: Well, sometimes there were...had...two in a room.

DB: Did you ever homestead in this area?

OJ: No.

DB: Do you know people who did homestead?

OJ: ...I tried to homestead and they said I couldn't do it.

DB: Why was that?

OJ: That was way back East. No. I think it was here. Right across the river--the Sagle River.

DB: Is that S-A-G-E-L?

OJ: S-A-G-L-E.

DB: Where there many homesteaders there?

OJ: Well, I...I...don't know. I think there was.

XF: Of course the Franzlers homesteaded in Montana.
OJ: Who?
XF: Your brother-in-law and sister-in-law. They homesteaded in Montana--Emma and Claire.
OJ: Oh yea.
DB: What was involved in the homesteading process? What did people do to homestead.
OJ: I don't know.
DB: So, you lived in a house in the Milltown area, besides the rooming house? What was your house like that you lived in, that you had for yourself?
OJ: Well, you know, I stayed across the river. It was a man named Charlie Malcus(?) had a place there. I roomed there.
DB: What years were that?
OJ: That must have been 1910.
DB: 1910. What was the house like?
OJ: I couldn't describe it. It was just a pretty fair house.
DB: Do you remember about how many rooms it was?
OJ: Probably four or five rooms.
DB: Four. Was it one story or two story?
OJ: I think it was two stories.
DB: And, do you remember how old the house was, when you moved in to it?
OJ: No.
DB: Was it young or was it old, do you remember?
OJ: I don't remember. 10 or 20 years old.
DB: Did Malcus build the house?
OJ: That I don't know.
DB: So how many people lived in the house, when you were over there?
OJ: Well, probably four.
DB: Four? Were they also lumber workers?
OJ: No. I don't know. The other...
DB: Did it have a porch on it...do you remember?
OJ: Yes, I believe it did.
DB: How many doors?
OJ: Probably, just two outside.
DB: Did it have a yard around it?
OJ: No. Very little yard.
DB: What kinds of plants or flowers, or garden was in the yard? Do you remember?
OJ: No, I don't think so.
DB: How was the house heated?
OJ: With a stove.
DB: With a stove. Was that fairly common around here to have a stove in a house?
OJ: It was. There wasn't any gas or oil heat here.
DB: Were they all wood stoves?
OJ: Yea, all wood stoves.
DB: And how long did you live in that house?

OJ: Well, I got married in 1912. And we lived in a house for seven dollars a month for room and board...no, not board. We rented the house for seven dollars a month.

DB: Where was that located at?

OJ: Just a block and a half from where I am living now.

DB: And when did you move into the house you are living at now?

OJ: 1913.

DB: 1913.

OJ: Hm-hm. There was a man, an engineer for Humbird Lumber Co., named Remington, old people...very old...and my wife heard that he wanted to sell his house. It had been built for them by Humbird Lumber Company. It's the best built house in the world. Finest lumber you could get, and I paid for it \$500. In 1914, or '13; I don't know for sure.

DB: What kind of lumber is the house built of?

OJ: Oh, it is white pine and fir.

DB: Is it the old white pine?

OJ: Yea.

DB: Why did they build the house for the engineer? Was that a common practice?

OJ: No. That I don't know. He was the head engineer, he knew all about this country. But, it's all selected lumber. He was getting so old that he wanted to pass away. My wife had heard that he wanted to sell the house. We went to talk to the people in 1913.

DB: Did you have a garden in the new house...out back?

OJ: Well, we had a little bit of a garden, nothing that was anything particular.

DB: What kinds of vegetables did you grow in it?

OJ: I think we grew...we grew some apples.

DB: Apples.

XF: We never had a garden at our house, we just had fruit trees.

OJ: Yea.

XF: Italian prunes and apples.

OJ: It's true we never...

XF: There was never any garden, it's that we youngsters put in carrots, or that.

DB: Say, back in the old days, what room was the most important room in the house to people?

OJ: The living room.

DB: And how was the kitchen set up, in your house? Did it have a stove, like they all have?

OJ: Yea, it had a stove.

DB: Did you have rooms that you used more in the Winter than in the Summer?

OJ: No, not that I know. It's a two story house.

DB: Where did your water come from?

OJ: It came from the Sandpoint Water Company.

DB: So it was city water.

OJ: Yea.

DB: It was always city water. Did you ever have a root cellar, out in the back yard?

OJ: No.

DB: Was there ever a fence around the house, or a hedge, or anything like that?

OJ: Yes, I think there was a fence?

DB: When...did they have city trash collection here? Or how did you get rid of your trash?

OJ: I don't remember that.

XF: I can remember...I mean, I can only remember having only garbage collecting. I can't remember...

DB: How many houses were in your neighborhood at that time, when you moved in...in 1913 or '14?

OJ: Not so very many. The block where I'm living now. There are homes every 50 feet on the block.

DB: Was everybody in the neighborhood friendly with one another, or were some families more friendly than others?

OJ: Yea, we never had any trouble.

DB: Everybody got along pretty well?

OJ: Yea.

DB: Was there a name to your neighborhood, that you lived in?

OJ: No.

XF: Well, it is Farmin's Addition, isn't it?

DB: How do you spell it?

XF: F-A-R-M-I-N. I mean when you vote, its Farmin's addition.

OJ: Yea, that's right. Humbird.

XF: Wait a minute. What is it...is it Humbird Precinct?

OJ: Yea, I think so.

XF: Maybe Humbird precinct. Farmin's is this location, excuse me.

DB: Was there a lot of cooperation between families? Did they work on community projects together, or anything like that?

OJ: No, I don't think so. I don't remember.

DB: Did they ever go together on child caring? Was there a baby sitter?

OJ: No.

DB: Were there any people in the neighborhood that had special skills or special crafts? For instance, were there basket makers, or snowshoe makers, or furniture makers?

OJ: No, I can't think of any.

DB: You can't think of anybody. How about the whole town of Sandpoint, was there anybody?

XF: Well, just with their work...people who did horseshoeing, and a black-smither--blacksmith.

DB: Where was the blacksmith's shop located.

OJ: Cedar Street.

DB: Ceaser Street

XF: C-E-D-A-R.

DB: What is your present address now?

OJ: 614 North 4th.

DB: 614 North 4th. Where did the children play, in the neighborhood? Where would they go out to play?

OJ: I don't know...

XF: Well, we'd play in the yard or at the neighbors.

DB: But there was no, just central place?

XF: Oh no, there was no.

DB: What denomination church did you go to?

OJ: Lutheran Church.

DB: Lutheran? Was that German Lutheran, or?

OJ: It was Norwegian. It was the First Lutheran Church...it's called. This is some Germans and mostly Norwegians.

XF: There used to be a separate German church, and they sold their properties and went in with the others. So everybody is together.

DB: Is that First Lutheran Church still around?

OJ: Yea.

DB: It's still here.

OJ: Not the old church. The church was built in 1905 or something.

XF: A little over 10 years ago we built a new church.

OJ: It burned down.

DB: When did that burn, do you remember?

XF: Well the old church burned about 1924. But they had it rebuilt by Easter. And later on, they tore it down, sold the land, and build this new church down on Olive.

DB: About how many people belonged to the church, when you started going there?

OJ: Oh, probably 50 people

XF: In fact, he helped clear the land for that church.

OJ: Yea. I was waiting up there for the Humbird Mill to start up, there were all lumber pilers up on the...what was the street...where the highway is?

XF: Fifth Avenue?

OJ: Fifth? Seventh Avenue, wasn't it?

XF: Oh, oh what...I don't...? What are you trying to establish?

OJ: The place; I stayed in a house there.

XF: Oh. Number Five Milltown?

OJ: No, before that.

XF: Well, I don't know where you stayed before that.

OJ: What's the street that goes north?

XF: Were you at Comden's.

OJ: Further out.

XF: Larch?

OJ: No, further out.

XF: I don't know.

OJ: What's that big street, that goes way out, up north?

XF: You mean Fifth Avenue?

OJ: Well, Fifth and Sixth and Seventh Avenue, it is.

XF: No, there isn't a Seventh.

OJ: (Mumbled)

XF: Fifth and Sixth...Boyer?

OJ: Boyer, yea.
DB: So that's where you were living when you were building the church. What was the address of the original church?
OJ: That was the corner of...
XF: Poplar and Fifth?
OJ: Yea.
XF: Well, he didn't build the church...
OJ: That's 60...
XF: No, that's Fifth Avenue. It was on Fifth Avenue.
OJ: Oh, that's right. Fourth is where we live at.
XF: Ha. He didn't help build the church. But he and his friends cleared the land.
OJ: Professor from St. Olaf's College came and told us and said, "We are going to build a new church. A Lutheran church." But we were staying there waiting for the mill to start work so we could pile lumber. And we didn't have any money. He asked us to contribute. Of course we didn't have any money. But then he told us where the church was going to be built. We offered to clear the place. We cleared the ground.
XF: Cut the trees down. This was all treed area.
DB: How many times a week did you go to church back then?
OJ: About once a week.
DB: Once a week. On Sunday morning?
OJ: Ja.
DB: Did you ever have any special functions during the week? Any special church functions?
OJ: Ah, I can't think of any.
DB: Where was the old school, back when you first moved here...to Sandpoint?
OJ: Primary school right where the Bank is now.
DB: And is that on First Street?
XF: It's on Second.
OJ: On Second.
DB: On Second Street? And how many children went to it, back at that time?
OJ: Oh they had a lot of children.
XF: That's hard to say.
DB: Well how many grades did they have?
XF: Well, eventually they had all the grades there. They even had high school.
DB: But, when you first moved here, how many grades did they have? do you know?
OJ: Oh, it must have been four to five grades.
XF: It's pretty hard to say, you know. Because they had a self-made school. Didn't they?
DB: During the year, how long did they go to school? Did the children go to school? Was it like now?
OJ: Just like now.
XF: Oh sure.
DB: Just like now? OK.
DB: Was it a one room school house, or a larger school?

OJ: Just one room.
XF: Well, I don't know what they had at Farmin's but of course the Farmin was a big building. It had 10 school rooms, on two floors. And the auditorium was on the top.
OJ: Edith used to teach there.
XF: ...constructed that. And when I went to school, they had a building outside, for the first grade, at least. Whether the second was there, I don't know.
DB: What was the name of the first school that was here, the one room school, that you were talking about? Do you remember the name?
XF: I suppose that was Southgate. I wouldn't know for sure, I don't know, 'cause I never went to that.
DB: When you first moved here, in the early days, did you buy many things at the store?
OJ: No, I didn't. Didn't have enough money to buy anything with.
DB: If you did go to the store, what kinds of things would you buy?
OJ: Well, gloves and pants.
DB: How about food? What food would you buy at the store?
OJ: We didn't buy food at the store, we just lived in a boarding house.
DB: So you just ate whatever you ate at the boarding house? If you would go to the store which store would it be, then?
OJ: Well, Humbird had this very good store.
DB: So it was a mill store?
OJ: Yes. It had the most...the most business in town too. If you go to the office...if you worked for Humbird you get a coupon book, you could trade it out in the store.
DB: Did many men do that? Or did they take cash?
OJ: I did it myself.
DB: Would you get all of your money in coupons, or would you get part cash, part coupons?
OJ: You'd get some cash at the end of the month, too.
DB: How big was the Humbird store?
OJ: Oh, that was a big building as big as any store now. It's burned down since.
DB: Was it one story, two stories?
OJ: I think it was one story.
XF: It was one story, but it didn't burn down. No, they tore it down. They tore it down. They had their big office...their office was probably as big as this store.
OJ: Their office connected with the store.
XF: But of course, the rest of the store was twice as big...
OJ: Edith remembers from when she was small.
DB: How were the prices in the store?
OJ: Well, I couldn't compare them now but they were very reasonable. Humbird was a good place to trade.
DB: Did you ever buy anything mail-order, or did you buy it mostly from the store?

OJ: No, I never bought any mail-order.
DB: OK, back to daily living. What kinds of food did you eat? What kinds were common in your diet, back then, in the early days?
XF: Meat and potatoes, wasn't it?
OJ: Just that.
DB: Meat and potatoes.
XF: How about...what kind of vegetables did you have? Oh, do you mean in this country?
DB: Yea. I am talking about, since he has been in Sandpoint.
XF: What kind of vegetables did you have, you suppose?
OJ: I don't remember.
XF: They didn't have fruit. Because oranges were very expensive and they were real uncommon.
DB: Did you eat any wild foods? Like nuts and berries, or anything like that?
OJ: Probably did.
XF: Oh, you had berries, all right. Grandma mentioned that.
DB: What kind of sweeteners did you use? Did they always have sugar, or...?
OJ: Yes they always had sugar.
DB: They always had sugar. Were there any special foods for different times of the year? I mean were there festival foods, or anything like that?
XF: We had for...Norwegian delicacies.
DB: What kind of Norwegian foods were popular?
XF: We had romme grot and ah...
OJ: Yea.
DB: How do you spell that?
XF: I suppose R-O-M-M-E, isn't it?
OJ; Yea.
XF: ...G-R-O-T.
DB: What is that?
OJ: That is a cereal. A cream cereal.
DB: Similar to cream of wheat, something like that?
XF: Isn't it rice?
OJ: Yea.
XF: We never had any at our house, see. You folks did.
OJ: But not rice.
XF: It was rice. It was rice with cream on it.
DB: What other kinds of Norwegian foods were popular?
XF: Lefse. L-E-F-S-E.
OJ: Seemed like a sheet of paper, you know. Very good.
DB: Is it a kind of a bread?
OJ: Yea.
XF: You put butter on it, other things too...roll it up.
DB: Were those special foods? Like if you wanted a special treat, then that would be something you would eat.
XF: Yes. You didn't have that all the time.
OJ: Ya.

DB: What kind of clothes did people wear, when you were working at Humbird's? What kind of outfit did you have?

OJ: We didn't have no jeans. I don't think. They weren't popular then. We had the pants made at the tailor.

DB: Were they cotton, or?

OJ: I think they were cotton.

DB: What kind of shirts did you wear?

OJ: I don't remember about the shirts either.

DB: Did you ever have to wear any kind of hat on your job? You didn't have to wear hard hats, did you?

OJ: No, no hard hats.

DB: What was a typical day like for you when you moved here? You'd wake up...what time would you wake up in the morning, to go to work?

OJ: Six o'clock, I think.

DB: When did work start?

OJ: I think, about eight. No, maybe nine.

DB: And then when would you take your lunch break?

OJ: At 12.

DB: At 12. And then how late would you work in the afternoon?

OJ: Until five o'clock.

DB: Until five. Did you do mostly piling, when you were working over ther?

OJ: Yea.

DB: How many years did you do that?

OJ: Five years.

DB: And then, what occupation did you do after that?

OJ: That's what I did until I started the store.

DB: In this building here?

OJ: No, up on Third Avenue. It was half a block...it was two blocks from Humbird Store. I was up on Main Street you know. We had good business there. I started two blocks from Humbird Store. A little place about half as big as this.

DB: Were you Humbird's competition, at that time?

OJ: Yes.

DB: Well, how did that work?

OJ: That worked fine.

DB: OK.

OJ: Never had any trouble. I didn't bother them much. I started in a small way, until I made my name.

DB: Why did you decide to start up a store back then?

OJ: You know, in Norway, before I came over here I worked in a store for 18 months. A country store. They sold everything. Groceries. And everything.

DB: And you liked it, I take it.

OJ: Yea. And then when I started and went into the business, I didn't know anything about bookkeeping. But I...I read the advertisement that the Central Lutheran Academy and

Business College in Tacoma, Washington. And they advertised to students. So I went down there, and they taught me bookkeeping.

DB: How long did you go to school?

OJ: One winter. And, we used the same bookkeeping here now that I learned there. Back in 1906.

DB: So they taught you everything that you needed to know.

OJ: Ja.

DB: Who did you go see about starting up a store? Was there any way to go about doing it?

OJ: I wanted to go into business for myself, but then I didn't have no money. I had \$300, and there was two other fellows that had 300...

(END OF TAPE 4; Side 1)