

Norwegian-American Historical Association Oral History Program

P0584 Audio 1A

Rølvaag, Jennie Marie Berdahl

Jennie Marie Berdahl was born on June 1, 1879 in Minnehaha County, South Dakota to Andrew James and Karen Oline (Otterness) Berdahl. Jennie was born in a sod hut before South Dakota received statehood. She attended Augustana Academy in Canton, S.D. and was a county school teacher. Jennie Berdahl married Ole Rølvaag in 1908 and lived in Northfield, MN. Together they had four children: Olaf Arnljot (1909-1915), Ella Valborg Tweet (1910-2003), Karl Fritjof (1913-1990), and Paul Gunnar (1915-1920).

Interviewed: Jennie Marie Berdahl Rølvaag

Interviewer: Lucile M. Kane

Index by: Marisa Campanaro

Length: 00:28:22

Abstract

In this interview, Jennie Rølvaag talks about her pioneer father, Andrew Berdahl, and his life in South Dakota territory, and her marriage to Ole Rølvaag.

Keywords

Immigration; South Dakota Territory; Berdahl family; Ole Rølvaag

JBR – Jennie Marie Berdahl Rølvaag

LM – Lucile M. Kane

Interview Session April 21, 1955

Time	Keywords
00:00:00	Interview with Mrs. Rolvaag. April 21, 1955
00:00:40	LM: Let's start with, talk a little bit about your father. JBR:
00:00:55	LM: How many of them were there in the group? JBR: There were 15
00:01:38	LM: And your father's name was Andrew? Andrew Berdahl? JBR: Yes.
00:01:45	LM: Will you spell the last name? JBR: B-E-R-D-A-H-L
00:01:47	LM: Was your father born in Norway? JBR: He was born in Norway and I believe he was about 8 years old when they came to this country.
00:02:05	LM: Did they come right to Minnesota from Norway? JBR: Yes, I think they did.
00:02:28	LM: Where did they settle in South Dakota? JBR: In Garretson, in Minnehaha County. About 15 miles East of Sioux Falls.
00:02:47	LM: How much land did they take up?

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00:03:09 **JBR:** 60 acres, no, maybe closer to 50.
LM: How old was your father when he went to South Dakota?
JBR: He was 35.

00:03:21 **LM:** And was he married then?
JBR: No, he was not married.

00:03:41 **LM:** And what was her name? What was his wife's name?
JBR: Otterness.

00:03:48 **LM:** What was her first name?
JBR: Karen.

00:03:51 **LM:** Ah, so K-A-R-E-N?
JBR: Yes.

00:03:56 **LM:** How long did they live in Minnehaha County, South Dakota?
JBR: They lived there until they died. The last place that my father lived was in Sioux Falls.

00:04:21 **LM:** Who lives on it now?
JBR: My brother has it now.

00:04:24 **LM:** How many children in your family?
JBR: There were 8 of us.

00:05:13 **LM:** What kind of a man was your father?
JBR: Well, he really was a wonderful man.

00:06:33 **LM:** When did he first meet Ole Rølvaag? When did your father first meet Ole Rølvaag.
JBR: Oh, I think he met him up the street while in town.

00:06:46 **LM:** Yeah, I'd like to know when your father first met Ole.
JBR: My brother

00:07:14 **LM:** Did they talk together quite a bit when they first met?
JBR: Oh I can't remember, later on.

00:07:46 **LM:** Did your father ever write down much of his life?
JBR: No, not much.

00:08:26 **LM:** Is your Uncle's in English or in Norwegian?
JBR: That is actually written in English.

00:08:38 **LM:** You talked Norwegian in your home, didn't you?
JBR: Well, not the later years we didn't.

00:09:10 **LM:** Did Mr. Rølvaag teach you Norwegian when you first met him?
JBR: Oh yeah.

00:09:15 **LM:** How many years did you go to Augustana?
JBR: I went there for 3 years.

00:09:50 **LM:** Did you get engaged by letter?
JBR: Yes, yes I did get engaged by letter.

00:11:12 **LM:** When you were engaged that next year, where did you live?
JBR: The first year we lived in the house together on the property.

00:13:51 **LM:** And then he would come home for his lunch?
JBR: Oh yeah, he would always come home for lunch.

00:13:56 **LM:** And then classes in the afternoon?
JBR: Depended but usually yes the classes.

00:14:19 **LM:** When did he do his writing?
JBR: Odd hours, since he did have much time during the day.

00:14:39 **LM:** He didn't have to teach at all during the summers, did he?
JBR: No, no he never had any summer classes.

00:14:50 **LM:** Did he write in longhand or use a typewriter?

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00:14:55 **JBR:** Yes, he wrote it all in longhand.
LM: Did he write many drafts?
JBR: Well I can't say much about that. I don't know.

00:15:44 **LM:** Did he do a lot of research as he went along?
JBR: Well, no.

00:16:18 **LM:** I'm curious to hear about the stories between the Irish and the Norwegians
JBR: I wouldn't know for sure.

00:17:10 **LM:** How long did you spend your summers in Northfield?
JBR: 22 years.

00:17:38 **LM:** Did he get quite a bit of writing done during that period?
JBR: Oh, yes. Everyday at the most! We had a big deck at the cabin that overlooked the lake.

00:22:47 **LM:** What did your brothers think of Ole?
JBR: Thought he was quite simple.

00:23:40 **LM:** And you liked waffles, didn't you?
JBR: Oh, yes! I liked them very much. We had a very nice wood burning oven.

00:28:22 End Interview