

Finding Aid to the O. S. Gunderson Papers

Gunderson, O. S. (Ole S.), 1877-1965

O. S. Gunderson Papers, 1880-1989

1.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 365

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Links: Finding Aid to the [Eva Nelson Papers](#)
Finding Aid to the [Rodney Nelson Papers](#)
View photograph collection on [Digital Horizons](#)

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Rodney Nelson, 2009 (Acc. 2880).

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Citation: [Identification of item]. O. S. Gunderson Papers, MS 365, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

Ole S. Gunderson was born in Aarnes, Norway, a short distance northeast of Kristiania, present day Oslo, on October 26, 1877, to parents Sigvart and Oline Marie Gundersen. The spelling was later changed from Gundersen to Gunderson. In 1880 Ole's father Sigvart emigrated to the United States. The following year his wife and children followed. They settled in Dakota Territory south of Fargo in the Red River Valley.

Ole received a law degree from the University of North Dakota in 1907. Gunderson owned a law firm in Noonan, North Dakota, for a number of years. On February 25, 1914, Ole married Signe Johnson, and they had five children: Eva, Orville, Dorothy, John, and Lloyd.

Ole moved his family and his law firm to Christine, North Dakota where he lived until his death on October 18, 1965 at the age of eighty-seven. Ole had many other ventures in addition to his law practice. He sold insurance, ran for political office a number of times, and at one point was a writer for the *Normanden* newspaper of Grand Forks, North Dakota. His column was titled "Under the Stars and Stripes." Additionally, Ole would often write letters to the editor for various newspapers. He worked as U.S. Conciliation Commissioner during the Great Depression. Congressmen William Lemke had recommended his appointment. He was a respected lawyer and a NPL activist. Gunderson was appointed to serve out a term as county judge in Wahpeton, North Dakota, in the late fifties. At the time of his death he had been a member of the North Dakota Bar for fifty-eight years.

O. S. Gunderson appears as the character O. H. Iverson in two of Rodney Nelson's novels, *Home River* and *Villy Sadness*. Rodney Nelson is O. S. Gunderson's grandson.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The **O. S. Gunderson Papers** is a diverse collection of documents, correspondence, journals, and writings that span from before Gunderson's emigration from Norway to the United States in 1881 to after his death in 1965. Gunderson lived the American dream. He started as an immigrant who worked hard and received a good education and rose to be a successful and respected individual and lawyer.

The records after Ole's death are from his daughter Eva Nelson who saved, gathered, and arranged them. The collection's organization was based and expanded upon what Eva had already put together. Many of Eva's personal notes are present throughout the collection. The O. S. Gunderson Papers is comprised of eight series: O.S. Gunderson, Correspondence, Family, Financial, Land, Legal, Writings, and Subject Files.

The [O. S. Gunderson Series](#) includes items relating to the life of O. S. Gunderson. The series has been arranged alphabetically. Gunderson's personal journals, ranging from 1960 to 1965, constitute most of the series. However, the journals are not very comprehensive and do not reveal much information on Gunderson or his life. The journals mention daily weather conditions, things Gunderson did that particular day, and if anyone stopped to visit. The scrapbook, on the other hand, provides an overview of Ole's life. The scrapbook also was assembled by Eva Nelson, one of Gunderson's daughters.

The [Correspondence Series](#) is the largest within the collection and spans from 1896 to 1982. It includes both outgoing and incoming correspondence. The series has been arranged alphabetically with the exception of O. S. Gunderson. His correspondence was placed at the beginning. The rest have been separated into correspondence to and from Gunderson's family, such as his wife, children, and father. There are also many letters written in Norwegian that have been arranged according to their place of origin and whom the correspondence was to and from.

The [Family Series](#) includes information on O. S. Gunderson and members of his family, mostly on his father's side of the family. The series contains the birth and marriage records and the naturalization papers of Gunderson's father, Sigvart. There is also a note written by Carl Gunderson, Ole's uncle and Montana homesteader, in Norwegian the night before he died. Carl writes he is very sick and tried to make it to a neighbor's but was forced to turn back. A Gunderson family tree was put together by Eva Nelson and organized into two parts. In the first part Eva traces the descendants of Gunner and Anne Nilsdotter Gundersen, Sigvart's parents. The second part is dedicated to the family of Sigvart's wife, Oline.

The [Financial Series](#) is arranged alphabetically by topic and spans from 1900 to 1964, but there are considerable gaps within this time frame. The series contains financial records from both Ole and Sigvart.

The [Land Series](#) consists of records relating to Gunderson estates and land. The series is arranged alphabetically. Part of the series is dedicated to land in Montana and the other part with land in North Dakota. With the death of Carl Gunderson, Ole and Sigvart began managing his estate in Montana. When Sigvart died, Ole managed his father's estate in North Dakota. There are correspondence and procedural, legal documents that pertain to both estate matters.

The [Legal Series](#) contains some of O. S. Gunderson's court cases that span the length of his long legal career and some legal correspondence. One particularly interesting case is Gunderson v. McPherson. Gunderson filed suit for \$100,000 against Brigadier General John McPherson, commander of the Minot, North Dakota, Air Force Base. Gunderson claimed the sonic booms generated from the Air Force jets caused permanent damage to his heart. His complaint was dismissed in court.

The [Writings Series](#) includes a number of O. S. Gunderson's writings along with others relating to him. Gunderson would often submit letters to the editor to a variety of newspapers on many different issues. For a time Ole had a column called "Under the Stars and Stripes" in the *Normanden*, a Norwegian American newspaper in Grand Forks. There are about ten articles in the file and their topics include stories from his personal life, about Norwegian immigrants, stories about his father, and Norwegian folklore. Ole also wrote many other things, like his opinions on particular issues and subjects, which were not published.

The [Subject Files Series](#) consists of mainly miscellaneous items that did not correspond with any of the other series. The series is arranged alphabetically by topic. One interesting item is a title for a 1915 Ford Model T. Not all of the items are Ole's. Some, like a NPL certificate and a certificate of road labor, belong to Sigvart.

SEPARATION RECORD

Photographs (Processed as Photo Collection 498)

- 11 Photographic prints of Noonan, North Dakota, farms, and portraits of O. S. Gunderson and his family.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Content
1/1	Finding Aid, and Historical Information
	O. S. Gunderson Series
1/2	Birth Records, 1946
1/3	Funeral Book, 1965
1/4	Journals, 1960-1961
1/5	Journals, 1962-1963
1/6	Journals, 1964-1965
1/7	Journals, Miscellaneous
1/8	Scrapbook, 1877-1965
	Correspondence Series
1/9	O. S. Gunderson Correspondence, 1910-1961
1/10	Dorothy (Gunderson) Grangaard Correspondence, 1953-1956
1/11	Eva (Gunderson) Nelson Correspondence, 1943-1982
1/12	Family Correspondence, 1909-1956
1/13	John Gunderson Correspondence, 1951-1958
1/14	Lloyd Gunderson Correspondence, 1945
1/15	Norwegian Correspondence—Ole and Sigvart Gunderson, 1912-1925
1/16	Norwegian Correspondence—General, 1910-1923
1/17	Norwegian Correspondence—from Norway, 1900-1953
1/18	Norwegian Correspondence—Nils Gunderson, 1896-1929
1/19	Orville Gunderson Correspondence—1944-1945
1/20	Signe (Johnson) Gunderson Correspondence, 1916-1953
1/21	Sigvart Gunderson Correspondence, 1911-1937
	Family Series
1/22	Birth and Marriage Records, 1876-1880
1/23	Carl Gunderson, 1913
1/24	Family Information
1/25	Gustav Adolf Gunderson, 1895-1901
1/26	Naturalization Papers—Sigvart Gunderson, 1891, 1942
1/27	Newspaper Clippings, 1929, 1936, 2008
1/28	“OSG Small Town Lawyer,” 1975
1/29	Vaccination Record, 1881

Financial Series

- 1/30 Chattel Mortgage, 1900
- 1/31 Insurance Documents and Letters
- 1/32 Financial Book
- 1/33 Promissory Notes, 1883-1919
- 1/34 Receipts, 1908-1964

Land Series

- 1/35 Carl Gunderson Estate–Montana, 1913-1934
- 1/36 Gunderson Estate–Montana, 1920-1965
- 1/37 Gunderson Estate–North Dakota, 1912-1965
- 1/38 Gunderson Estate–North Dakota–Financial Books, 1929-1932
- 1/39 Gunderson Estate–North Dakota–Financial Records, 1904-1957
- 1/40 Land Deals, 1897-1919

Legal Series

- 2/1 Court Cases, 1909-1961
- 2/2 Halvorson v. Halvorson, 1958-1962
- 2/3 Gunderson v. McPherson–Sonic Boom Case, 1962-1963
- 2/4 Legal Correspondence, 1928-1964
- 2/5 Mechtle v. Swanson, 1957

Writings Series

- 2/6 “Fargo Would Love It!”
- 2/7 Letters to the Editor
- 2/8 “Pleiebarnet”
- 2/9 “Under the Stars and Stripes,” 1950
- 2/10 Writings and Opinions

Subject Files Series

- 2/11 American Almanacs, 1910-1912
- 2/12 Certificate of Road Labor, 1883
- 2/13 Cunard Steamship Ticket
- 2/14 Map of Noonan, North Dakota
- 2/15 Model T Title
- 2/16 Norwegian Independence Day Song, 1919
- 2/17 NPL Certificate of Membership, 1916
- 2/18 Phone Book, 1960

2/19 The Book Supply Company Letter, 1914