

ORAL HISTORY 01-74-18

Bill Cashen

Fairbanks, Alaska

September 5, 1968

Bill Cashen is introduced by Earl Beistline. Bill said he used to begin by saying I'm glad to be here and now I say I'm glad to still be here after all these years. Last year UAF celebrated its fifty-year anniversary. He put together a collection of slides covering the history of the university. He has shown them twelve or fifteen times and he never tells the stories the same way. The university history is in a nutshell the cornerstone. It all started on the Fourth of July, 1915. The photo shows the laying of the cornerstone by the local Masonic Lodge. On the front of the stone is AACSM which is the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines. The next slide shows James Wickersham on the cornerstone. He was a larger than life character in Alaska history. He was a delegate to Congress and introduced a bill in 1915 to establish a land-grant college and even specified where it should be located. Wickersham wanted it in Fairbanks and he got it. He and friends made the cornerstone. He had envisioned that the place would pay for itself. A land-grant college receives 50,000 dollars a year from the government and he thought the land grant could be rented out and that would be sufficient money. In 1917 the Territorial Legislature appropriated money to get the college started. Bill said the Alaska State Department of Education was also established in 1917. On September 13, 1922 they dedicated the college. Governor Scott C. Bone was present and arrived by motor car from town to the college. They dedicated the one building on campus. There were six students in 1922. The trustees had to select a president. They selected Charles Bunnell. He came up to Alaska in 1900 to teach in Kodiak. He studied law on his own. In 1914 he lost to Wickersham for the delegate position. He was appointed judge in the Fourth Division. He lasted 27 years as college of the president. A basketball team was organized at the college including three Loftus brothers and the McComb brothers. In 1926 a dorm was built. It was located opposite the Eielson building. It was later used as a general usage building. There is nothing here now that was here in 1929. The president's house was moved to behind the fire department. All the frame structures are gone. The big main building was located approximately where the memorial plaza is located. The students took the train out to the campus and then walked up the hill. In December 1934 the temperature was 44 degrees above and they all had their pictures taken outside. Otto Geist was the father of the museum. He came in 1924 to study a mining short course. He became interested in collecting on Saint Lawrence Island and was funded by Bunnell. The Eielson building had a ground breaking with Wickersham in 1934. The president's cottage is the only remaining building from the original buildings. In 1935 the college name was changed to the University of Alaska. He talked about names of buildings. In 1934 the first floor of the Eielson building was built. There was very little done for the next ten years because of the war years. They were a military camp for several years. They had a hospital unit in Hess Hall. There were only 67 students those years. Many buildings were taken over by the military. Cap Lathrop was a member of the Board of Regents. There were prominent visitors from

time to time. General Eisenhower came for a visit in 1946. Ivar Skarland was a graduate in 1935 and then became a professor of anthropology at the university. Dr. Bunnell retired in 1949. The second president was Terris Moore. He served for four years and four months. A dormitory is named after him. The Geophysical Institute was built by the federal government in 1949 or so. The skating rink was located in front of Wickersham Hall. At one time there was also an outdoor swimming pool. Dr. Schmitz and Bernt Balchen gave the commencement speech in 1954. Dr. Patty was then president of the college. He served as president until 1960. He was a member of the first faculty. Constitution Hall was built in 1955 just in time to take care of the Constitutional Convention. The Eielson building was completed in 1950 after sixteen years. They built one floor or section at a time. In 1960 Bunnell Building was constructed. Dr. Wood has served as president since 1960. The cornerstone was rededicated after being removed because of construction.