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Name and place: Constitutional Review Convention Luncheon

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Notes: Originals on 7-inch reel. Master copy on CD.

A man's voice [George Sundberg] starts the recording by saying that their president Bill [William A] Egan isn't present because he is delayed, and their vice president isn't present either. He tells that he and Catherine Nordale got to the convention venue a few days early to assist Vick Rivers in the arrangements, and George got to be the MC. He corrects himself and says he was talking about Vick [Victor] Fischer.

2:00 George starts his speech by saying that 20 years have passed since 55 men and women met "here" at the campus of University of Alaska [in Fairbanks]. Alaska Constitutional Convention of 1955-1956 was a great adventure, not only for the people "in this room" but for all Alaskans at that time. The years that lead to Alaska becoming the 49th state were stirring and eventful. Today's conference is about reviewing the history of their state up until 1976, and trying to look ahead into Alaska's future.

In 1955 and 1956, they were looking into a murky and uncertain future. Statehood was a goal but not a certain one, and nobody could say when it would arrive.

4:01 They like to think that what they accomplished 20 years ago in drafting the constitution helped in speeding its attainment. Constitutional Review is sponsored by Constitutional Convention delegates, University of Alaska, and Alaska Humanities Forum. They are currently on the first day of the review, and they are going to introduce the delegates to the Constitutional Convention.

There were 55 people who worked on the draft of the constitution. 13 of those delegates have died over the years, but 28 of the remaining delegates either are or will be present. George wishes that the delegates who are present with their spouses would also introduce the spouses.

5:40 George introduces Roland Armstrong [unclear talking], [Lucien] Frank Barr [unclear talking], John Boswell. George tells an anecdote about how people are

excited that John Boswell has returned to Fairbanks. He continues introducing Lucien Barr, [Seaborn] J. Buckalew, and says that John Coghill will join them later. There are George Cooper, [unclear name], [unclear talking], [Edward V.] Ed Davis, [James P.] Jim Doogan, Helen Fischer, Vick Fischer, [unclear talking], Dorothy Oz Hellenthal [sp?], and [Thomas] Tommy Harris isn't yet checked in but he will be present later.

John Hellenthal, Herb [Herbert Henry] Hilscher, and Jim [James J.] Hurley [unclear talking]. George mentions that Catherine was an assistant secretary to the Constitutional Convention. Yule Kilcher is introduced [unclear talking], Eldor Lee [unclear talking], Maynard Londborg [unclear talking], [Marvin] Muktuk Marston [unclear talking], Steve McCutcheon, John McNees, Leslie Nerland, Catherine Nordale. George tells that Catherine's daughter Mary is an attorney in Fairbanks and will be coming to the convention later. Catherine's son Jim is also joining in. George introduces his wife, Mary, after which he continues introductions with Barrie White [unclear talking], and Ada Wien who says that she was the last one to sign the constitution.

14:26 Ada Wien tells that [unclear talking] took more pictures of the delegates than anybody else, and she has brought them with her and will place them somewhere where people can look at them during the dinner.

George introduces people who weren't delegates but who should be introduced regardless: Tom Steward, who is the secretary of the convention, and an honorary delegate who was the successful advocate of Alaska-Tennessee plan, George Lehleitner.

15:51 Two of the assistants who helped them during and after the convention are with them today. One of them, John B. Cochran [sp?], was ill during the convention. The dean of the consultants who worked during the convention is John Bebout [sp?]. They have good memories about the convention 20 years ago.

George continues: They [the University of Alaska] are also happy to be co-sponsors of the convention. He is glad that the initial convention was held at the University of Alaska campus because he thinks that it influenced their deliberations in a way that would not have occurred if they had held the convention in Juneau.

17:49 The president of University of Alaska, Robert W. Hiatt is present, and he is their host. He, in turn, will introduce their guest speaker for the night. Hiatt

addresses George and jokes about his encounters with weather while he was living in England. He says the University of Alaska is pleased to have “this distinguished assemblage” meet on the campus.

Hiatt continues by saying that the Fairbanks campus is proud for having served as the location of the Constitutional Convention. Constitution Hall is adjacent to “this current building,” and those who were there 20 years ago, and hardly ever since, would have hard time finding the Constitution Hall today because the University of Alaska has changed.

Nowadays Fairbanks campus is the parent campus of UA and they have a state-wide system today that was made possible by wisdom of the writers of the constitution. Hiatt hopes that the voters in the state won’t offhandedly change the constitution by amending it without having an opportunity to have another constitutional convention to weigh the various events, activities, concerns, predictions.

22:02 Hiatt continues that George has indicated that some 28 of the original delegates are present in the convention, and at the 10 year convention there were 27. Hiatt jokes that it is fantastic because that indicates that Alaskans get stronger as the years go by. Hiatt gives his best wishes to the delegates, panelists, and their work.

Hiatt is going to introduce a person who is an outstanding educator and a specialist in government. People in education are bound together by what “you” and “we” consider common concern, which is to determine what is a good society and develop means for achieving it. Hiatt says that “your” arena is larger than “ours,” but the University has no less concern than “you do” with a good society, and he admits that education is not the only means by which it can be achieved.

Hiatt thinks, along with educational theorists from Plato to today, that a state is an educational society. Society’s educational fare will be determined by its conception of the nature of mankind.

24:39 Hiatt introduces the following speaker [Dr. Paul Norman Ylvisaker] who was born in Minnesota and received his education there. He completed his doctorate in 1948 in Harvard on political economy and government. Then he spent 8 years working in political science department, after which he did various things for a while before settling to a position of the professor of Public Affairs and Urban Planning in Princeton University. In 1972, he returned to Harvard as the

dean of faculty.

His principal scholarly efforts have concerned development and planning in cities, he is a prolific writer and a valuable board member.

Ylvisaker thanks President Hiatt and “this family” who invited a foreigner in to get an opinion from outside. Ylvisaker tells about his Norwegian immigrant family’s 100-year anniversary and says that he feels close to people who are immigrants in Alaska. He tells that he has heard that the original convention 20 years ago was akin to a religious experience and jokes about having a revival.

27:40 He tells that when he read through Vic Fischer’s story on the convention, he was impressed how they had outdone the original framers of the [United States] constitution that was written in 1787. Alaskans were better on the religious side in that “you” put God into the constitution.

Ylvisaker poses a question of why Alaskans succeeded in what the original framers did not, and tell jokingly that he has found that the Founding Fathers had debates and they were close to breaking up. One morning it was proposed that the convention would invite in a minister and from thereon start every morning with an invocation. Then they debated if they should invite a minister.

Ben Franklin said that he’s against it because he was afraid that the word of their trouble would get out. Alexander Hamilton opposed it too in basis of them not needing outside assistance [laughter]. Then a Presbyterian minister got up and opposed the invocations because they didn’t have enough money to pay to the preacher [laughter]. Alaskans had the forethought of having Reverend Armstrong in their midst so they didn’t have to pay him. They also kept God in the constitution after a debate.

30:06 Prior to his arrival, Ylvisaker thought that he would have to deal with more governors in one room than he had ever dealt with since 1968. [He starts telling an anecdote about coping with governors that is cut short by ending of the tape.]

[End of the recording.]