

78-4A-6  
June 28, 1973  
Fairbanks Pioneers Home  
Interviewing: Rebecca Farrel

Rebecca Farrell was born in Wales in the year 1886. She came to the United States when she was only one year old. Her father preceeded his wife and two daughters and found work in Montana. He was a laborer, Becky recalls. Becky took nurses training in Montana and was graduated from nursing school in 1912. She was the 38th nurse to be certified in the Sate of Montana.

She apparently is well educated (in addition to her nurses training). She speaks perfect English, is sharp even at the age of 87.

Rebecca met her first husband Cal Suksdorf in a Misoula, Mont. hospital. She was a floor nurse, he a patient. She recalled that Suksdorf had swallowed a toothpick and surgery was required. The couple was married in 1925.

Suksdorf was a mining engineer (born in White Salmon, Wash. and graduated from Ames University). He had been in Alaska before, apparently though this is not clear from Becky's interview. At any rate, the couple went to Nome, Alaska in 1927.

They sailed from Seattle on the Victoria. The voyage took them across the northern ~~Pacific~~ Pacific Ocean to False Pass in the Aleutian Islands. There they were in the Bering Sea which in the spring was still full of ice. The ship proceeded slowly, but after the discovery of smallpox aboard the captain slowed the ship even more.

The stewardess came to Beck Farrell (Suksdorf at that time) and said she understood that Becky was a nurse. Yes, Becky said. The stewardess said she had a family aboard that was sick...all of them. Would Becky examine them? She did and said when the door of the cabin was opened she determined immediately that it was smallpox (from the odor of the room). She ordered the family isolated and the captain was in a rage. The family was a Native family who had been in Seattle. The parents and the children all had smallpox at the same time. A wireless message finally was sent to Nome advising of the potential epidemic. The commissioner in Nome wired Washington and Washington in turn ordered a hospital ship in the San Francisco harbor to go to Nome. The ship made it to Nome ~~at~~ "roadstead" where the Victoria was anchored in five days.

Nome had no vaccine for smallpox. Everyone aboard the Victoria was ~~is~~ vaccinated and then allowed to go ashore. Becky was credited with preventing a massive smallpox epidemic in the Nome area and the Arctic (western Arctic)

Cal Suksdorf and his wife lived in the Nome area for several years. They ~~built and~~ built and operated a dredge on the Solomon River for

several years. The gold mining was a profitable enterprise. Every dredge on the river was successful. The Suksdorfs went outside each winter and returned in the spring for another season of mining.

On one of these return trips to Nome - in 1928 or 1929 - Becky was a passenger of Noel Wien in Wien's aircraft. She was the first woman to fly into Nome, Alaska in an airplane. She said several women had flown out of Nome before, but that she was the first to arrive by airplane. That trip took them to Iditarod and then over to Unalakleet where weather forced them to wait. Becky slept on the floor of the trading post and the other people there (all men) slept upstairs with the trader). The plane was an open cockpit affair. Trip originated in Fairbanks.

Nursing sort of took a back seat once Becky came to Alaska. However, she was called on to mend minor injuries on the Solomon River site. She nursed her husband's badly burned eye one summer and cured the burn. She nursed in the Nome hospital once and helped save the life of Ada Wien's father who was suffering from pneumonia.

When the depression hit and the price of gold was too low to make a profit, the Suksdorfs returned to Montana. There Becky went back to work nursing full time. She and Cal returned to Fairbanks in 1935 on a trip...he to look over some mining property. She remained in Fairbanks, staying at the Pioneer Hotel. Mary Tibbets and her husband operated the Pioneer Hotel at that time. Mary came to Becky and asked her if she minded moving to another room for a while because she needed a double room for Will Rogers who had wired ahead for a room. Since Becky's husband was out on the creek she consented. It was a cordial meeting with Mr. Rogers. She admired his southern drawl, especially when they met and Will Rogers said, "Charmed, I am sure."

Cal Suksdoff became ill in the early 1940's. In 1944 he became desperately ill with emphysema and a tumor of the breast. He was operated on but lived only four days.

In the meantime Becky was in correspondence with people in Alaska who were interested in Suksdorf's mining property. One such man was Ed Farrell who wanted to acquire some of the property. He asked her to come to Alaska, and she did. The wooing and winning of Becky are unclear, but she and Ed were married in Fairbanks in 1946.

Today, June 28, 1973, Ed Farrell is past 90 (91, I believe). He has seen his last stampede, Becky thinks. Ed has been very ill recently with a ~~bow~~ heart condition and other physical problems. He came into the "Orange Lounge" where I was interviewing Becky...had to ~~find~~ find out what she was doing. He woke up from his nap and she was gone, gone, gone.

(more)

Back to Nome..... Becky recalled vividly the arrival in Nome of Charles and Ann Lindberg. Their plane was forced down in the water at Safety, a trading post about 15 or 20 miles from Nome. They survived okay and went about getting the plane back in shape to continue on to Japan.

City big wigs wanted to lend Mrs. Lindberg a formal gown for the reception that Nome threw for them, but Mrs. Lindberg said "no", that she didn't have any clothing like that with her and she preferred to be casual. Casual she was around the plane. She wore overalls just like her husband.

The reception was at the Pioneer Hall, Becky recalled. Everyone in Nome who was able to squeeze into the hall was there. During the program an Eskimo woman with a baby tucked in the back of her parka cause some rukus. The baby began to cry right in the middle of ~~the~~ the ceremony for the Lindbergs. The Eskimo mother made her way to the edge of the raised platform (where all the dignitaries were seated...and speaking) and sat on the edge. She pulled the infant from the back of her parka and opened up the front and began to nurse the hungry baby. People were mortified and tried to remove the Eskimo woman. And Lindberg stopped them, Becky said, and told the would-be bouncers "She's only doing her duty. She's a mother." The Eskimo woman remained and fed the baby and the ceremony continued.

Becky recalls meeting Amundsen at Nome, too. Amundsen's dirigible landed at Teller where Becky's friends Mr. and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ ran the trading post. Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ took pictures of the dirigible and Amundsen. Becky recalled that Amundsen was a "huge" man.

By the time Becky had returned to Fairbanks in 1946 to marry Ed Farrell she was 60 years old. She had never had any children, being almost 50 years old when she first married. She said she regretted ~~never~~ never having any children. She and Ed are the last surviving members of each other's family line.

Becky is a charter member of Auxiliary No. 8, Pioneers of Alaska. Ed was King Regent in 1962 when Eva McGown was the Queen Regent.

She talks about Mrs. Wilbur on tape no. 2. Mrs. Wilbur is the late Mrs. Alden Wilbur (died winter of 1972-73). Her first name was Mariel and she was the 1972 president of the Auxiliary. She died of cancer. Lovely woman who visited often at the Pioneers Home.

Becky recalled that her husband Ed was a baseball player in his young days. Ed came to Alaska when he was 15 years old...that would make it 1897. he's one of the early Klondike stampedeers. Too bad he is not able to communicate better now. Good, however, that Harrie Hughes taped him several years back! Thank goodness Harrie did what he did for so many of those he interviewed are gone now. Ed was one of the drivers of the diptheria vaccine for Nome.