

ORAL HISTORY 78-40-01

Pioneer Women of Alaska

Mike Dalton, interviewer

Clara Rust

Fairbanks, Alaska

Spring 1974

Series: Tanana Yukon Historical Society tapes

Clara Rust and Mike Dalton discuss the history of the Pioneer Women of Alaska and in particular the origin of Igloo number 3 which was a woman's igloo. Mike reads from Clara Rust's History of the pioneer women of Alaska which she wrote in May of 1954. On February 5, 1916 a group of Alaskan women was called together in the federal courtroom by the president of the Pioneer Men's Lodge, Igloo no. 4, Mr. A.R Heilig. Mr. H. T. Ray was acting secretary. The purpose of the meeting was to interest the pioneer women of Alaska and the watershed of the Yukon to organize an igloo as an auxiliary of Pioneer Igloo no. 4. A motion was completed to organize such an organization. The ladies elected Mrs. L. Harmon Casky as president. She was elected temporary president.

Mrs. Ed Herting was elected secretary. At this time there were only two women's igloos in Alaska. They were no. 3. On February 19th they met to adopt the constitution and by- laws. They chose the colors purple and gold and iris as their flower. According to the by- laws members had to be female and white whose interests have been identified with Alaska and lived in Alaska or the watershed of the Yukon for fifteen years or more. One hundred and seven women signed the charter. The first official officers were elected and installed and they were: president, Anna P. Casky vice-president, Bertha Patterson, second vice-president, Mrs. Charles Johnson, secretary, Agnes P. Herring, treasurer, Mary Gould, historian, Lydia Protzman, sergeant-at-arms, Helen Protzman and guard, Mrs. O.C. Williams. They had meetings the first Saturday of each month until 1953 when it was changed to the second Monday of each month. They moved the meetings to the Odd-Fellows Hall. On March 1, 1924 they voted not to be affiliated with the Pioneer Men as an igloo or their auxiliary. They wanted to be a true pioneer organization. They took in members related to pioneer men as mothers, daughters or sisters who had been in Alaska or the watershed of the Yukon for at least six months. On May second they voted to drop the name Igloo no. 3 and became the Pioneer Women of Alaska. They ceased their connection with the Grand Lodge. It was noted that on October 6, 1924 they amended the constitution to read: to become a member of the lodge one had to have arrived in Alaska or the watershed of the Yukon prior to January 1, 1908. On January 5, 1935 they voted to buy the old Wright grocery building and convert it to a hall of their own. Delia Dunham, Genevieve Parker and Mrs. Jack Sullivan were on the building committee. On June 1, 1935 they met for the first time in their hall. The officer's stations were built by George Bachner in memory of Maude Nielson. Chairs were donated in memory of sisters by husbands or members of the family. Donations were given to furnish the hall. Alice Hanley was presiding president when they moved into their own hall. Delia Dunham took care of the building for many years. The members in May of 1954 were: Adrianna Coyle, Anna E. Creamer, Alice Hanley, Emma McKinnon, Dorothy Loftus, Amante Tonseth Hanson, Kristina L. Stewart, Mary Miller, Agnes Thomas, Ebba Mayben, Genevieve

Parker, Maria Morgan, Fannie Joyce, Louis Carsten, Mary Schoeser, Dorothy Green, Clara Rust, Burtha Moody, Margaret Bell, Annie Nerland, Amante.K. Hanson, Charlotte Cuban, Nora Sutherland, Suzanne Taylor, Grace Hard, Helen Bockman, Ruby Clark, Cora Wier, Agnes Wanamaker, Mary Rapp, Leona Foster, Maddie Stroeker, Mabel Moore, Elsa McGee, Elizabeth O'Connor, Isabel Stanford, and Joan Vernetie. As the membership declined they started talking about selling the hall. They decided to meet at different member's homes. They sold the hall in August 10, 1953 and used some of the proceeds to fund a student loan fund at the University of Alaska. Adriana Coyle and Anna Creamer handled the sale. On May 10, 1954 there was enough money to give to the University for the student loan fund. Agnes Thomas and Clara Rust delivered the money to Dr. Patty stressing that the money be used as a perpetual student loan fund. The lodge had twelve to sixteen members attending meetings at this time. The officers at that time were: Adrianna Coyle, past president, Agnes Thomas, president, Ebba Mayben, first vice- president, Agnes Wanamaker, second vice-president, Clara Rust, secretary, Louise Carston, treasurer, Christa Stewart, historian, Alice Hanley, chaplain, Mary Miller, sergeant at arms, Anna Creamer and Annie Nerland, trustees and Mary Schoeser. The letter written to Dr. Ernest Patty asked him to list the loan fund as the Pioneer Women of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska. Clara Rust reads a newspaper article from February 21, 1916 about the new pioneer women's organization. The membership to begin with was open to women who had arrived by 1901. They decided on 1908 later.