

Call number: 94-06 SIDE A

Name and place: Joseph [T.] Flackne is interviewed by Margaret Van Cleve

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Margaret introduces Joseph Flackne who is a University of Alaska graduate from 1934. He received an honorary doctorate from the University for his distinguished service to Alaska and a longtime supporter of the University of Alaska.

Margaret tells that Joe first came to Alaska in 1929 to attend the UAF that was then known as the Alaska Agricultural College and the School of Mines, and says that his experiences could fill several books. She wants to talk with Joe about his involvement in the Statehood Movement, and asks what influenced Joe with the statehood.

Joe tells that Alaska was different from most places in that the men were lonely, but able to provide money for schools. Joe found that Alaska was mentally ill and people were sent to Morningside. As the joke goes, there is Inside, Outside and Morningside. Sending mentally ill people there started when the United States purchased Alaska but did nothing. Some Americans got to Sitka where they did things that annoyed the Natives and it took a Canadian gunship to go in and rescue the Americans. That brought the nation up to thinking about what to do. They appointed four sheriffs over the four districts of Alaska and each one of them was alone.

2:26 There were incidences where there were three people on a creek and two got "cabin-happy" and ganged up on the third, claiming he was crazy. Then the Marshal would have to come and arrest them. There was no place to go, and the Marshals might have them for months in some kind of a log cabin until they got the authorization to take them to the States. That was a bad thing for everyone. When they went out, there was no place that wanted to take Alaska's mentally ill, but they found a man with a Drink Tank where drunken sailors could go sober up. The man took the group [of mentally ill men] and took care of them. There was no medical care or regulations on how they should be treated, which led to terrible things.

4:00 The man got going and saw that he had something. He pulled the politics on it, getting a law passed that said that Alaska's mentally ill couldn't be contracted with anyone who was not in the certain area, and that would be west of the Cascades, north of Seattle [Joe must mean south] and south of Portland [Seattle]. They couldn't be sent to any other place by law.

The man, who got the contract, built the hospital into a wonderful farm. Margaret asks what the man's name was but Joe doesn't remember. It was a successful for him, but not for anyone else. When Joe was sent to Washington D.C. to work on the Statehood Act, he learned that Morningside came under his

jurisdiction. Joe asked why they at the Interior Department don't have a single doctor running an institute of that kind. Margaret says that that happened in 1946 when Joe was the Chief Alaska Division [unfinished sentence.] Joe had been on his position for a couple of months when he visited the Morningside to see how it was and felt that something should be done, so he raised a question about how an agency like that [the Interior Department] can have a say on that if they don't have a doctor.

6:36 Joe saw the Secretary Chapman and he didn't know why things were like they were and advised Joe to go see Dr. Perrin from the Health Department. Joe went to see him about them taking it [care of Alaska's mental patients?] over, but they said that Interior Department wants to be in charge of it. They offered to help by investigating the facility [of Morningside].

They had a U.S. team studying mental health facilities and Dr. Albright headed up to the Territorial Section and they came to the conclusion that something should be done about "this." Alaska was a territory, they had no authority, and the Congress took care of Alaska's issues. They didn't have a vote in the Congress, but only a Delegate who couldn't vote.

8:32 The only doctor in the place was the one who represented the Interior Department, but while he was a nice person, he was weak. He didn't enforce anything. Joe saw "this thing" and went back to Washington D.C. They did a few trips to Morningside and found out that all the men were in one hut and all of the women [were in another?]. There was no separation for tuberculosis people and tuberculosis was the main diet in Alaska's Native people.

Every year they introduced a legislation to correct that, but "his" political clout was such that the issue would go to Congress and they would say that mentally ill people couldn't be treated in Alaska because of the cost. Year after year, they went to Congress to correct it, until they got statehood [and Alaska became a state instead of a territory]. Margaret says it was starting from 1946. Joe says it had also gone on long before he came into it.

10:33 When they visited Morningside, Joe found out that they never had a registered doctor of medicine there and that they never had registered nurses. When the Congress would come up, they'd build a fruit area and acquire a fine herd of cattle. The place was run well, but the Native people were like slaves who were actually living on [unclear]. There was lots of food growing and the owner was making big money. He shouldn't have had the people with TB together with the rest. Margaret asks if the mentally ill and the tuberculosis people [Joe cuts her off]. They were mentally ill but a big percentage of them had tuberculosis.

They were trying to correct it, and the Congress was agreeable, but none of them had the spunk to do anything about it.

12:10 One thing that should be researched was what Joe saw on one of his trips there. As he entered the main part of the building, he saw a woman in white – like a nurse – to go into a bathroom on the side. She turned on water and placed a baby in the sink. When Joe came out, steam was coming out and Joe had to take the baby out of the scalding water. He believes that the baby lived, but wonders if that

was Morningside's way of dealing with pregnant Native girls, since there was no place for mothers to take care of their children.

One year, before statehood, an army of women from California came to protest putting Alaska Natives into [an institution] that was in Alaskan Siberia.

14:17 The owner of the Morningside made money because there are every kind of fruit and dairy in that area. He had the finest herd of cattle that one would want and when the Congress visited, they pointed all that out, but never took them into the bunkhouses. Margaret asks if government money paid for all of that, and Joe says it did, since they were contracted. He was making money using people as slave labor.

It seems impossible that that could happen in the highly unionized area of Washington State. It was north of the Columbia River and South of Seattle. Joe is certain that they never had a single graduate doctor or a registered nurse even though they wore the clothes.

16:33 They got it [unclear exactly what] only after statehood. The Congress hoarded the money and they got 500 bed Indian Service Hospital in Anchorage, and 400 bed one in Sitka. They were for Native use. When they were ready to go, they wouldn't open the hospitals up because they couldn't find doctors. They insisted on having American doctors but there were lots of Europeans who were professional and ready [to work] after the war.

Joe asked that the sick Natives should, at least, be taken into the hospital where they could be cared for, even if there were no doctors. It took a long time.

18:36 As that was going on, the Navy had one cement block medical building in Sitka. When they wanted to get in, there was the "gilded cage" in Anchorage, where they wanted to get money in place for children. Bone tuberculosis was terrible, but nobody would take the youngsters with it [to be treated], not even the Shriners [Shriners Hospitals for Children]. There was a place for 50 people but they put in 55 and gave them the best care that they could, with the facilities they had.

Their doctor was interested in bone marrow and bought himself Sears-Roebuck deep freezer and used the bone matter in their surgeries. Having seen the crippled children, it was unbelievable that that was the state in which the 55 kids were in. Joe came back a year later and the kids came running towards him. It was very far from right or wrong.

21:10 The bureau, that was in charge of the funding, found out that when Joe came in and spoke for Alaska, he knew his subject. Joe wasn't cheating. When the war ended, the head of the Bureau of the Budget that had to do with hospitals called Joe and said that they didn't have anybody to handle surplus property and asked what Joe would think if they went to Congress to get an authority to dispose of surplus properties to the Secretary of the Interior. He also had road commission, the railroads, and over 92% of Alaska was within his power. Joe's answer was that nothing could be better than that.

23:20 [Joe is talking about the Indian Hospitals in Anchorage, the gilded cage and other things, but the summarizer is not sure of what he is talking about.] The doctor who was interested in bone marrow used his own funds to buy the freezer in order to help people.

24:35 After statehood, they got the money. The Congress was so liberal that the one thing that they asked for was to build a unit to a hospital where “these people” could be treated, since none of the hospitals were ready to treat tuberculosis people. They got the authorization by law and money, so they got the madly disturbed people, who were tested by doctors, for treatment. Most of the people never had to go to Morningside and they spent just a couple of days or weeks with proper doctors who helped them. They weren’t mentally ill but they were nervous because of lack of food and other matters.

Margaret asks if Joe is talking about the Native people or White people. He says that there were white people too in the mix. White people usually got into the hospital system, but the Native people didn’t.

That was one of the most important battles that Joe ever fought. He had lots of help from governors [Edward Lewis] Bartlett and [Ernest] Gruening, and from Dr. Albright, but because of a fluke in law, there was much that they couldn’t do. With the hospital building, they finally took over some responsibilities of the Indian Service. They started letting Native girls in, and would at least bring them [the patients] water. They might die but at least they weren’t living underground in some poorly constructed Native house in which they used to live.

27:49 Joe says he’s too old for that, but he would like to start researching how many of the pregnant Native ladies lost their children at the Morningside. Nothing has been done with that, and nothing will be done before someone gets excited about the subject. Joe is excited enough, but doesn’t think he’s capable of handling it anymore. He says that his mind is a one-track mind these days.

Margaret recaps the story so far: Joe’s support for the statehood act came from wanting to reform the health care. Joe says that there was a lot more to that. Elmer [Edwin] Rasmuson was a good banker, but the war was on, and housing was scarce. They got the Congress to amend laws when new laws came in. Rasmuson wanted the banking act corrected. In it, when the bank has used up its funds, they can turn the notes in and have them restored. That was prior to Statehood.

30:35 Joe and the others got some laws amended before Statehood. Joe was asked to take the job to work for statehood, but also to handle some of the people. Joe knew Tony [Anthony] Dimond, but it was Bob Bartlett who was their delegate to Congress at the time. Gruening was the governor who knew the weakness of it [not sure what he’s referring to] and helped a lot.

Margaret says that Gruening was Joe’s predecessor as the director of [unclear] and territories. Joe tells that “this man ran rampant,” but it was only after Gruening that things started to happen. Joe’s assistant, Will [perhaps Maurice Wilfred?] Goding was a Native who was born in Skagway. They started to go through the new laws and made amendments to issues concerning territories and island possessions.

33:37 Margaret points out that at that time, the United States had some island possessions in the South Pacific. Joe's assistant Will Goding was appointed to be the high commissioner. Joe was already retired, but Will wanted him to go out to the island possessions where very few people went to. Many islands had never been visited by people from high commerce as it was called. A boat will go out periodically to pick up [unclear] and bring in food and mail but there was no radio or anything and "they were just out there."

When Joe visited the places, they knew that they needed to get out and see "these people" and they were very gracious towards a person coming from the territory because they had been under Japanese rule. Then the United States went to the United Nations to ask if they could help the Pacific Islands develop their own self-governance. That is what they worked on, and Joe says that gives the high commissioner credit.

They had a think-tank with the top people where they looked it over and their constitution is better than "our own" [USA's]. Then it was turned over to the Navy because they had the surplus property. The admirals wanted to be on Hawaii, so they took trips there [to the islands] and reported on that. The civilian group around there had it blocked, and the Natives even had to go through a gate to get in. It was insulting to them, and Joe's group started correcting that issue. The people were grateful for them for coming in.

38:16 Joe came in to their medical place [in Hawaii?]. The floor had been eaten by termites and the linens were never changed, so they were black with sweat and blood. They were lucky if there was even aspirin in there. Margaret says that she guesses that territories were the stepchild of the United States and that they wouldn't get equal treatment. Economically, they had much to gain from statehood. Joe tells that Elmer Rasmuson came in and they started using their right as they should.

They were going to build two big airbases and extend them out from their local one. They wanted long runways in both, Anchorage and Fairbanks. They couldn't get a really big airport at the Tanana Valley because "we" [Fairbanksians] wouldn't let them ride [fly?] over town, so they built it at Eielson Air Force Base. Sometimes the officers circled a little because they had never seen such long airstrips as they have in Eielson.

41:38 As the chief of the Alaska Brads, it was Joe's responsibility [discontinues the thought, mentioning that Governor Gruening and Bob Bartlett were there too.] Joe was going to the [Department of the] Interior to see General Buckner. At Whitehorse he was flagged down and asked by a general there if he was going to Edmonton to talk to a man there who was out of control. They were building the Alaska Highway.

[End of the recording.]