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Jessie Bloom Interview, 6/30/1970 and 8/5/1970

Summary created by: Jacob Metoxen

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Notes: Original on 7 inch reels. Master copy on CD.

Jessie Bloom begins speaking about the passing of the Enabling Act. She says the first thing to legislature did was pass a bill granting the suffrage of the women of Alaska. She said the women made some pertinent comments on that because they wanted to make it seem like the population was larger than it actually was. To do that, they included the women in the Enabling Act. After the legislature was over, she's not sure what day but she believes in was November 1913 that a notice appeared in the Fairbanks News-Miner that there would be a meeting for the women at the federal courthouse at that time the courthouse was on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Cushman Street. There was no indication who was putting the meeting on. All the women got together and decided to see what the meeting was all about. At that time Jessie's baby was born in April and she was 7 months old. Bob was running the store and was very busy but told Jessie that he would watch the baby for her and close the store. Jessie arranged with Mrs. Zimmerman, who was the wife of a mining engineer and they had mining property on Fairbanks Creek, to get a ride to the meeting. Accompanying Mrs. Zimmerman was Mrs. Ferguson and Mrs. Abe McKinley has come over through the Chilkoot Pass. Her husband was working for the road commission and Mrs. Ferguson's husband had worked for an independent lumber mill and she is the mother of Forbes Baker.

The three of the women set out for the courthouse. They were living on 3<sup>rd</sup> St between Cushman St. and Lacey St. and the courthouse was on 2<sup>nd</sup> St. and Cushman St. At the meeting there were already many women there. They held the meeting in the large courtroom. She says there was a blackboard and Ed Wickersham, Jessie believes a cousin of Judge Wickersham, and Mrs. Pratt, the mother of the late Judge Pratt, was in the chair. Mrs. Pratt had come up from Denver about a year before. Mrs. Pratt's husband was also a judge. Denver had granted suffrage to women before Fairbanks. Every woman who could find a way was at the meeting.

Mrs. Pratt said the meeting was to come to order. The ladies asked Wickersham to explain how a ballot works. Just as Ed Wickersham was going to say something Mrs. Zimmerman stood up and said "It seems to me there's no necessity to explain what a ballot is like, were all experienced older woman, we've all come here to discuss the vote." Mrs. Zimmerman also said that there were many women who were present who had worked with the suffrage movement. She mentioned [inaudible] Lewis who had worked for the suffrage movement for a number of years. She then mentioned Viola King Kelly who had come from Arlton [?]. Viola and her husband had recently taken a honeymoon trip from Athabaskan Landing and all the way through the Pelly River and Peace River country and finally portage and did all

the most difficult things. Mrs. Kelly was expecting a baby and it would have been too difficult to go home to Arlton [?] where she had been teaching school. Mrs. Kelly decided she would stay on in Fairbanks until the baby came. Her husband, King [?], had written for a couple magazines [she believes one is the Cosmopolitan] she thought he would do writing and be alright if he spent the winter here. Mrs. Robert Jesse Bloom was also there. She had worked on the suffrage movement in London. Mrs. Zimmerman says she calls on Mrs. Kelly in recently on working on the suffrage in Oregon. Mrs. Kelly stood up and Mrs. Zimmerman deserved applause. The meeting had left Mrs. Pratt and had got into the hands of Mrs. Zimmerman.

Mrs. Kelly stood up and she talked for a while. She said she had the privilege of voting for the first time in Oregon. When she went down to the election and there was an old lady following her, crying and thanking with gratitude that she had been given the privilege to vote. Mrs. Kelly sat down and Mrs. Zimmerman said well we have Mrs. Linny L. [?], Lionel [?], Lewis who's been active for a number of years in the suffrage movement. Mrs. Lewis was an older woman. She stood up and gave a short history of the women's suffrage movement. She discussed the time when the Territory of Wyoming became a state, and Washington D.C. was willing to accept Wyoming and not the women. Wyoming claimed the women had always taken part in the Territorial meetings. And they wouldn't become a state unless the women came with them. As a result Wyoming was the first stated to be granted suffrage.

Mrs. Zimmerman said they would like to hear from Mrs. Bloom. Jessie got up and said as far as she could size up the situation, "Here in Alaska we've been unprepared because we didn't have to struggle for it." Back home they had to struggle for political and economic situation. She suggested that they go slow before they look at the ballot box on the backboard. Mrs. Pratt spoke up and said it was a good idea because in Colorado they had created civic clubs. Someone suggested a civic club get formed and that was seconded. They weren't interested in the vote anymore they were interested in finding out what it was all about. They had discussion about starting the civic club. They agreed to meet the following two weeks prior to a general election coming up. All of the candidates were invited to meet with the women or send a paper discussing their platform.

The next meeting was the meeting where the candidates were presenting their platform. It took place two weeks later. Jessie went home and told Bob about the new meeting and he said he would go and she would stay home. At the next meeting there had been a change of administration and Judge Irvin was promoted Marshall of the fourth division. He was at the meeting and all of the men and women. Jessie stayed home and had to depend on Bob to give her the scoop. According to Bob, it was quite the meeting. Dan Callahan and the newly appointed Marshall almost had a free for all. Jessie isn't sure what really happened but she said Dan Callahan was railroaded out of Fairbanks on some trumped up charge. The date that they had said he had been molesting some little girls was the date he had been working for the Road Commission and the records of the Road Commission. Means of communication were difficult back then so Dan had to do some time at McNeill Island where he declared his innocence. Finally the people at McNeil Island got the documents saying he was at work the day he was accused so he was taken out of McNeil Island and there had to be bonds put up for a retrial. James Fall [?] she believes, he had a store on 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Cushman Street and Bob Bloom were the only two that went on his bail. The President of this University of Alaska-Fairbanks Judge Bunnell was the man on the

branch when Dan was sent out. There was a very decided disagreement. Time passed on and Dan had his retrial and was exonerated. When Dan was elected to the next session of the legislature and the college required money for the legislature and Bunnell was there to try and get Dan's money.

At 14:30, the man interviewing is discussing the relationship between Brunel and Callahan but then becomes inaudible. Mrs. Bloom tells the interviewer he can do questioning now after this.

The interviewer asks if most of the candidates showed up to the meeting. Jessie says yes they showed up and formed the civic club and it became the WCTU. They worked for prohibition and eventually a number of smaller groups grew out of it. The women have always been very well treated in Fairbanks. The federal, state, and territorial positions that could be occupied by women were.

The interviewer asks what women groups were active in the First World War. She says the Red Cross was here, the Episcopal Guild, the Presbyterian Ladies, and the Catholics. Most of the church organizations worked during WWI. She says they were far removed from everything. She says there was a shortage of flour.

The Women's Christian Group is discussed. Jessie says she unfamiliar with that because she says her second baby was born in the summer of 1914 and she left in July 1914 for Ireland to have her second baby and returned in August 1916. At that time, the Civic Club, was very active and the Women's Christian Temperance Movement was just beginning to go to work. The activities of the Civic Club at first they had their classes in parliamentary law. She wasn't active in the Civic Club it took all of six months to get organized. Time was very lucid thing in those days. The George C. Thomas library didn't really have anything proactive. Compared to the women's suffrage movement in the states, Alaska wasn't really prepared.

Jessie became first involved with the Girl Scouts. Mrs. Davis has written history of Jessie's involvement with the Girl Scouts. She says she wrote the history up for Mrs. Jones and she returned to Fairbanks in 1937 and requests that the interviewer does not record anymore.

The recording starts again at 20:15.

In April of 1917 was when American entered the war. The first thing is Bob came home and he said he asked Van Biebbber [?] to put in an extra couple fields of carrots for us because the farmers decided through the Civic Club in order to serve through transportation anything that can be grown here will be grown. Also turnips and potatoes and they wouldn't have to have anything shipped into as far as they could manage. They had enough storage of sugar, flour, corn meal, dry fruits. It was the fresh food that needed to be mended.

When the harvest was ready they had all of the nice carrots. They also took out celery. They always had cold storage on the back porch. They put food in cardboard and it would freeze solid.

The interviewer has continually mumbled and spoken softly and continues to do so at 23:20, the questions he asks Jessie is inaudible.

Mrs. Bloom says the active women's groups were all connected with the church. She believes maybe the Pioneer Women might have been independent. They started in 1906. And the Eastern Star didn't organize until 1912-1913. The only groups were the church groups.

There is another inaudible question at 24:37.

Jessie says there were three or 4 Jewish women and she says her family was the only Jewish family that remained. She says the information can be found in the American Jewish Archives.

There were a few outstanding women that contributed a great deal to the country. One was Dr. Aline Bradley. She arrived with her husband in 1906. She was a graduate of the Pennsylvania Women's College. She was leader in the Presbyterian Choir and had the voice of an angel. Dr. Baskeville's career was an unusual one. Her husband suffered from asthma and that was one of the reasons they gave up their practice in Lancaster Pennsylvania. They were out on a bear hunt and the guide was a man name James Bradley. A few years later Dr. Baskeville died and the female Dr. Baskeville married James Bradley.

In the meantime there had been a failure at the bank. There was a question on what was to be done of the assets in the banks. They appointed a receiver and he was a good man. But the president of the bank went off to Seattle and Dr. Baskeville was responsible for having an organization to protect the assets in the bank. And Morris Randomnill [?] was appointed to an administrator. The feelings ran very high because nearly everybody had been depositing their money in the bank. There was some legal action taken that exonerated the bank officials. The Dr. Baskeville was connected to the depositor's organization and they burnt an effigy of the judge and the attorneys at an event. One of the attorneys was John Clark.

Mrs. Bloom is asked who the other outstanding women are at 29:35

Of course Mary Lee Davis is one who wrote three or four books on Alaska. Mrs. Davis was a dear friend of Mrs. Bloom. They had Mrs. Zimmerman. There weren't many college graduates. Mrs. Zimmerman was a graduate of Great Northwestern. Mary Lee Wesley [?] got her masters at Radcliffe College. Mrs. Hess graduated.

Mrs. Bloom says the type of woman who was here was a woman who could turn her hand to anything. One of the most outstanding women was Mrs. Herring. When Jessie went to visit Mrs. Herring, she'd be doing the dishes and she had a book with quotations called "Gems of English Literature" and she memorized some of those pieces. She said she might as well keep her mind on something worthwhile. She kept an open house for everybody. Jessie was out with her youngest daughter recently. Her name is Betty. Betty said every time there was someone new in town Mrs. Herring would bake a fresh batch of rolls and Betty would have to give the rolls to them.

At 32:06 the recording stops and starts. The interviewer states that it is August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1970 and this is a continuation of the interview with Mrs. Jessie Bloom for the University of Alaska Archives.

Mrs. Bloom says for some time in early November 1913 there were rumors of the cessation of hostilities. It had been arranged that the [?, 32:30] which always made announcements of importance. Bob and Jessie were talking and she told Bob the war is over. The next morning the director of the Episcopal Church, Lumbar she believes was his name; he jumped out of bed and began to ring the bell at the church. The next morning Jessie had her kindergarten class, just 5 of them, and she took them out to walk through the town. There was hardly anybody in the town because most of the able bodied men had worked in the shipyard or in the Army. She doesn't believe the population was more than 1,500. The children walked and sang songs about the war being over. Anyone with a store gave sacks of candy to the children. Jessie got back home and Fraternal Orders arranged a big celebration. They had all of the patriotic signs and speeches.

She believes they have a very interesting analysis about the lack of transit and communication from those days.

35:40

It happened that early in June when the Prince was assassinated [In Sarajevo] which they considered to be the start of the war [World War I]. Bob decided that Jessie should go outside because she was pregnant so Jessie went on a boat early in July around the 19<sup>th</sup>. They were on their way, close to Gibon [?], and there was continuous daylight. Some of the passengers got off the boat and went to the Signal Core station at Eagle. There was a notice pasted on the board that said "Germany has invaded Belgium, England and France are immobilizing." There were 5 or 6 passengers that came back to the boat with the news. By the time they got to Dawson they knew it was the truth because they were landing the wounded at Dunkirk. It took them several days to confirm the news. They got into Dawson and there were two trappers and they were going out to the hills because there was going to be a war.

There is talking in the background.

The organization of the kindergarten brings us back to 1918. Her youngest child was born September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1918. All that summer the children were playing outside and there were four or 5 children eligible for kindergarten. Jessie said after her baby came, she wanted to start a class and take Pat, Josephine, Debbie, and Barbara Woodward. Every day at 1 o'clock the other children would come up to the house carrying their lunch and they had their little kindergarten class. That went on from 1918 to 1922. The small kindergarten class was such a success they were able to convince the school board to have kindergarten attached to the school system.

Among the books she read to them were Montessori Method and Montessori Mother. Many of the ideas Mrs. Bloom used in her class were inspired by Montessori. One in particular was a game of silence. The Montessori method of teaching was you put the word silence on the board and they were quiet. At the request of the children she was able to incorporate the silence game into many different situations. One in particular was a walk they took to the Valdez trail. It was 1920 and she had 6-7 and her own two were in the sled. They were walking along. They played a game called angels and the trail was narrow. On both sides there were banks of snow. The children would divide into teams and make snow angels. The name of the game was seeing who could form more angels, the right or the left side.

They continued with the game and suddenly they saw a dog team. The driver of the dogs was saying something. She told the children they are going to play silence. The man said that his dogs are fresh; they have never seen little people. Get the children off the road. They went into the snow there and were quiet and the dog musher passed them up.

At 43:36 the interviewer asks what types of things she did with the children. The interviewer's lack of self-awareness when speaking clearly has Mrs. Bloom constantly asking him to repeat himself and/or playing a guessing game as to what the interviewer said.

Mrs. Bloom says they played the game Ring Around the Mobley bush. She had each other children make a suggestion of a particular action. She remembers this in particular because they were all supposed to wash their clothes and Debbie was standing there doing nothing. Mrs. Bloom asked Debbie if she was just going to wash her clothes and Debbie said no because she had a washing machine. At the regular public school, the primary teacher Mrs. Kelly said anything Mrs. Bloom needed she would help. She suggested letting the children have pins to pick out drawings of apples and oranges. They had to make up all of their lesson plans. The older children were doing the Palmer method at that time. The Palmer [Penmanship] involved writing exercises. Pam Herring looked at her and asked if she could stop because her arm was getting dizzy. Mary Lee Davis got kindergarten records with nursery rhymes that they were able to use in their drills.

Mrs. Bloom begins talking about Dr. Aline Bradley. Dr.'s husband Jim Bradley had some mining ground. The legal fees were so high for the grounds that they decided to study law. Dr. realized she couldn't acquire citizenship when she tried to pass the bar. Her first husband was an Irishman who had never become a citizen though he had qualified as a doctor. Jim Bradley was a French Canadian. He was American but adopted by French Canadian. Dr. had to take out her citizenship herself and she practiced law. [Jim] Bradley died in 1918 and that was when she had the citizen problems. She married Mike Fiddler in 1919. Fiddler was of German descent that had citizenship. He passed on in 1928. Dr. was living in LA at the time and she never practice in CA but she always kept up her license. During the Depression she took a position with a very wealthy family. The mother of the family became mentally ill and there were two older girls. Dr. took care of the mother. Dr. took many notes of her reactions. One of the ladies weaknesses was she took no notice in her appearance. They were driving with a chauffeur and some girls came out of a beauty parlor and the lady turned to Dr. and said she thinks she'll have her haircut and so she did. Gradually that awakened an interest in the ladies appearance. It was a step in the right direction.

During the time Dr. was in Fairbanks she was appointed City physician. One of the first things she did was she went down to the two dairies, Bentley's and Hinckley's, to study cows for tuberculosis. There had been examples of tuberculosis among the children who were drinking fresh milk. Everyone was opposed to her studying the cows that she lost her position as physician and the townspeople continued using the milk. It wasn't until 1925 that they got a proper government inspector and found that every cow was bad (30 moos all in one).

At 52:25 the recording becomes very crackly.

Fay Hurley is being discussed. Her husband was an attorney in Fairbanks. During the Second World War was when Fay worked in the American Women's Voluntary Services. That was the organizations most of the women worked for during the Second World War. Mrs. John White was the wife of the manager of the PAA [?]. She had friends in New York who were paying the express charges on any clothes that they would collect for Britain. From August 1939 to Pearl Harbor, they still were working for whatever they could for the allies in the Second War World. Because of this, they created a section of the Women's Voluntary Service. Mrs. Bloom was appointed Chairwoman of the Children's Board because they weren't sure if they were going to be bombed. There were about 25 children of school age. There were little meetings for the children so everyone could get to know each other, that was winter 1941.

Another interesting thing was the women had organized lunch preparation and Red Cross stands in different parts of the town in case they were bombed. One day they decided to take a piece from Oregon. The woman from Oregon decided to have an emergency lunch and time everything to see how fast they could do it. It turns out all of the women had stake in different places in case of an emergency and they had all went to separate places when trying to get the lunch together.

The interviewer wants to know about the girls scouts at 58:00.

In 1950 there was a meeting held at the Episcopal Parish Hall for the Directors of the Girl Scout Council. She was a member of the board of Directors for the Girl Scouts. The regular Camp Director was unable to come in and they were left stranded with all of the arrangements made. Mrs. Lola Tilly and Mrs. Bloom volunteered to direct the camp if there was a recognized nurse and recognized waterfront director. The four of them were able to take charge of the GS camp in 1950 at Harding Lake. It was the first camp within the premises. They had purchased the campsite from Mrs. Clank Clag [?]. The first had a group of girl scouts but they weren't registered. Mrs. Norton maybe Morton were the ones who signed the deed for the camp site. The last thing was the mushroom project which was started before the war started. It started with a geographical magazine in 1920. They got a copy of the magazine and there was an article about the mushrooms in New York City.