

Visit with Cora Gamble, March 6, 2001. *Other participants are Nancy Kuhn, Al and Bruth George. We're taping the conversation at the George residence, 512 Herning Rd., Fairbanks, AK. Cora continues to live on her homestead. Her husband, Robert, died last year. In front of us is a Fairbanks School District Map of 1953. Mileage given refers to Chena Hot Springs Rd., unless noted otherwise.*

B: When did you come to Alaska?

C: March of '53.

N: Didn't you say you were a young woman at the time?

C: Yeah, 22. With three little kids.

N: Where'd you start from?

C: California, Fresno. I was born in Oklahoma, but we moved out when I was about 4 or 5 years old. We just got married real young. Yeah, we married right out of high school. Actually, I was a junior, he was a senior. And he went to San Francisco and became a sheet metal man. I still have the original truck we came up in.

N: You didn't sell that one with the farm machinery?

C: It's a 1945 army truck. Army flat bed truck. My husband turned it into a swamp buggy. The kids refused to sell it. They said, "Don't you sell that, Mom." If you look at it, you wonder, how did five people sit in the front of that truck and come to Alaska, 3000 miles?

B: What brought you to Alaska?

C: My husband always wanted to come up here. And he didn't like the rat race. He worked forty miles away from home. He had to drive an hour to work. And we wanted to get away from family because we wanted to survive on our own. So we bought a 36' trailer and packed up our three little kids.

I walked three-quarters of the way. I didn't really. We'd come to these hills and spin out, so I'd jump out and block the wheels while he held the brakes. Then we'd put the chains on, he'd put them on one side and I'd put them on the other. Of course, I was only about a hundred pounds then, a hundred and ten. When we got the chains on, he'd start on up the hill, then I'd pick up the blocks, run up like a son-of-a-gun, throw the blocks up into the back of the truck and hop on the fender and ride on up the hill. Our little daughter, Kathy, she'd say, "Run, Mom, run!" It was an experience.

N: How'd you find your piece of land?

C: My aunt homesteaded this piece, the Veach homestead here (near Steese and Steele Cr. Rd.) They sold, then moved out here (to the current Amanita). Danny Blankenship, that's my aunt's place there.... When we first moved to Alaska, we parked our trailer here on the Veach property and I went to work at Ladd Air Force Base for two or three months, till it got to be spring. Then in the fall, we moved the trailer up to Pete Aiken's (corner of Steele Creek and CHS Rds.). We stayed there all that winter and looked. We would take the truck down that old trail that goes to the Penevitch mine, right here. The Penevitch mine is on the back (NE) corner of our property. Anyway, we'd take the truck on this old trail and as we went through here it was really, really pretty.

We cut the road, (*now ESRO Rd.*)¹. Don Herning gave up an easement on the east side. Pete wouldn't give us an easement but he sold us thirty feet along the west side of the road, so I own this thirty feet of ESRO road. Fry's gave me an easement and the Federal Government gave us an easement through here. The old trail that's in there is a RS2477², but ours is not, because we moved it off of the old trail.

We moved in here in the spring of '54, in April, and promptly burned my trailer down. Burnt the trailer the first year we were out there. We dug a hole, a basement, and then put the trailer over the basement. Put the coal stove down there and filled it full one day and the door didn't latch tight and by eight o'clock that morning the thing was gone. We lost everything. I had just bought the kids Christmas presents.

N: Did you have a well?

C: We'd get water out of Steele Creek. It was clean then. Wasn't polluted yet.

B: What's polluting it?

C: This site back here, ESRO. They had a chemically treated plant that they dumped into Steele Creek. I fought that tooth and nail.

N: Weren't you afraid that would contaminate any well you dug?

C: No, because the wells are too deep through here. All the wells are a hundred and something feet deep. It was chemically treated and supposed to be all right, but----. Lots of people got their drinking water out of that creek. It was a fast running little stream, fed from springs. This is Ruby Creek up here and it's spring fed. There must be fifty springs up in here. It's good water.

N: Do you remember when you went from hauling water to getting your own well?

C: About five years.

N: So, only about five years before they polluted it?

C: No, it was 15 years before they polluted it, '65 or '66, so we used it from 1953 till 1966. And that's when we quit using it. Everybody quit using it because of that. I made ESRO, for a long time, post a sign down at the Hot Springs Rd. that there was treated water going into Steele Creek. You know, a lot of our creeks are run-off from snow but this is not a run-off creek, it's spring fed. And it glaciers up on our road. We have to keep it thawed to keep it from running on top of the road.

B: When you came, Chena Hot Springs Road wasn't in place yet?

C: No, we had to come by Steele Creek. Chena Hot Springs Rd. didn't come through for probably four years after we came. You could go back to Loud's place, from 4 M, on a trail. The military came into their site (*anti-aircraft battery on Gettinger's present property*) on the back road by the graveyard.

The military used to pick us up. Right straight over us, at ten to fifteen thousand feet, was where they used to practice their bombing. And so they would come and evacuate us, once a month, and take us over to this little gun site, below Gettinger's..

¹ European Satellite Research Organization leased land from the State, beyond Gamble's starting around 1965.

² RS2477 indicates a federally designated right-of-way.

B: They'd evacuate you?

C: They'd evacuate us, keep us over there for three or four hours, feed us lunch and then take us home after they were through with the bombing.

B: Were they actually bombing or firing?

C: Firing. They were afraid something might fall.

B: You found some evidence of this?

C: Yeah. So rather than take chances of killing civilians, they moved them out.

N: And this was between what years?

C: From '53 to about '57. Until they abandoned the site, they took us over there, once a month. The only people on ESRO was just us.

N: Do I understand that you already had your land and the government came in and put in ESRO?

C: No, they didn't put in ESRO. ESRO was put in by Europeans. They leased eighty acres from the State of Alaska. They kept it until about '75.

Then the state opened it up for sale and there was quite a controversy over that, too, because they didn't advertise or hold hearings. Instead they just sold it to Dennis Wise and Dennis turned it over to Mr. Barefoot who was a preacher that wanted to put in a juvenile delinquent camp. I reared up. I said, no way. And they'd already done it, see. So I went to Anchorage and talked to the lands department and told them, "You haven't had a public hearing, you haven't done this, this and this." So they rescinded it and the project didn't fly, because too many people were opposed to it.

When ESRO came in, there was one particular stipulation. We would all give them our easements (there were seven people on the road by then), if they upgraded our road. They spent a couple million dollars on it. Louie Burdon had a pit on his property and sold them the stuff to put on it.

A: What needs to get stuck in here someplace is that ESRO was an European organization. It's illegal for a foreigner to have a functional radio transmitter inside the boundary of the United States. This was a very special deal because they needed to transmit to adjust the angle of the satellite, so it had national attention.

C: When ESRO left, the easements reverted back to the people. That was how we kept control of our property, kept control of what went back there. So when Barefoot decided to put that thing back in there I told him, "You don't have my easement. I'm closing it to you."

N: Is that why the "private road" sign is still up?

C: Because nobody has given up their easements, back there. When ESRO pulled out, the land went back to the state, then GCI wanted to put in their satellite dish, so we gave them the same contract—"You maintain the road and pay us X amount of dollars a year for maintenance and we'll give you the easements. When you're done, they revert back to us." They pay us so much a year, to use that road, then we put that money in a bank account and it's all used on the road. It has been beneficial for us because we can control what goes in there. If the money builds up, then I just turn around—this last year I probably spent \$14,000 on the road. The problem we have is that there's a lot of dead-beats on

the road that don't pay anything. There are only seven people on the road that pay anything, that get money for their easements. The rest of them wouldn't sign it.

N: George Fry bought or homesteaded this parcel and this one here. This one's on the trail but how did he get into this one?

C: George Fry never came in to stay. Most of these guys were GI's and in those days a GI could homestead a piece of property, live on it six months out of one year, and it was theirs. If you were non-military, you had to live on it six months out of the year for three years. They (*GI's*) didn't have to clear any property. We had to clear forty acres.

N: Did they ever put houses on these?

C: Nothing. Oh, yeah, this one had a little log cabin on it, this piece had nothing. Keith Foster built a cabin, right in the corner here. A little log cabin, that had a still in it. I'm not kidding you. It had a potato still. Somebody was making vodka out there. I don't know who it was. I don't know what happened to it. The cabin is still there, but none of the stuff is. He never did live on it, never cleared any property, never did anything. None of these other pieces had anything on them.

N: Was the trail up the creek a walking trail or a driving trail?

C: It was a "if you happen to make it, you do." It was probably an old wagon trail. It was the old trail to the Penevitch, so it had two tracks.

N: So did you get to homestead your land?

C: Yeah, we homesteaded 160 acres. This place just looked beautiful, it was just real pretty back there in the valley, and it still is.

N: Were you a pretty social group out here?

C: Well, yeah. We had a Homemakers Club and 4-H for the kids.

N: Did you have a church?

C: No. All that stuff people went to town for. And you were too busy to do anything. You picked sticks all day.³ You didn't just go sit down under the shade tree....

B: Mattie (Herning) says Tillie Brockman had a couple planks she laid across the creek to drive her tractor across and that sometimes she left them for others to use.

C: Yeah, she did. It just depended on her mood. She made the best beer you ever tasted. She made good German beer. The Brockmans were a very interesting couple.

My husband built Amanita Drive for Frank Fassler, then we built the one that went up the hill to Kalina's. Bob broke that road through in probably '65, '68, for a guy that was homesteading over in here (*on the Smallwood Cr. side of the hill at 7 M*).

B: We were told the Hot Springs Road ended out here at Ackerman's. Beatrice Herning said their cabin is still there.

³ The job between bulldozing and planting

C: Yeah, it is. There's two cabins there, one right after the second curve, like about 8 mile. It's still there. Actually, both of Ackerman's houses are still there, the one he built over by the curve and then that little cabin...

B: Was the one by the curve John Coles's place?

C: Yeah, but all that originally belonged to Ackerman. He built that sometime in the 60's.

N: You had three little kids and lived that far off the road, so surely Carl⁴ didn't come and get you..

C: No, we had to drive the kids out to the Hot Springs Rd.

N: Then they walked back in at night? Or you picked them up?

C: It depended. In the summertime I let them walk.

B: Did you have a vehicle at home when your husband was gone?

C: No, not at first. We finally bought a Jeep..... You know, I just taught them what to smell for and what to look for. I told them, "Make a lot of noise, as you come home."

N: What kind of animals were prevalent? Did you have bears?

C: Yeah, lots of bears. We shot about three back there that wouldn't leave my house alone. No wolves, I never did see any wolves. There was a lynx. There were a lot of lynx back there. We still have bear back there. They come through every summer.

N: Did you have beaver on your creeks?

C: Yeah, down here on Steele Creek, there's some ponds. They're still there. We never trapped. We never believed in shooting anything unless we were going to eat it. Squirrels are the only thing I ever killed because they were tearing my house to pieces.

B: When did Maranatha⁵ come in there?

C: It was owned by the Maranatha group out of Idaho or one of those places. That's where my kids went to kindergarten. This one (*Pentacostal Children's Home*⁶) was a little radical, but these people (*Maranatha*) were really nice. They had a kindergarten there because they couldn't take their kids to town.

B: Pete Aiken—was he a GI?

C: No, he was photographer and he moved up here years ago, think it was '49. He wasn't a GI that I know of. Pete was a photographer, by trade, out of San Francisco. They were the first family we ever met, out on Chena Hot Springs Rd. That's why we moved there, to Aiken's property, because they let us park the trailer for the winter. They didn't build until in the '60's. Oh, they had a house out there, in '54, when we moved out there, but it wasn't very big.

⁴ Carl Herning, who provided school bus service for the area.

⁵ Maranatha Childrens' Home, an orphanage. It was located on Steele Creek Rd., where Brices are now.

⁶ Another orphanage at 4 M.

N: Were most of you young, when you moved out here, or were some in their mid-years, when their children were mostly gone?

C: I think all of them were young. Most of the people. Maybe the Brockmans were older. I was not quite 23 when we moved here....

B: Did you know the Wortman's? They would have been across from your aunt, the Blankenships, here on Amanita.

C: I don't know. Carl Lindstrand⁷ was logging there.

N: They were cutting logs for houses?

C: Fire wood and houses.

N: Where did the logs come from for your house?

C: Off our place.When we first started this road and we were the only ones on it, there was a guy came in and homesteaded just to do the logging. He started hauling logs over this little bridge we'd built. He'd fill that truck to the hilt and drive over this little bridge. I told him, one day, "Look, if you're going to haul wood, cut those loads down because the bridge is not going to handle it." One day he went out and broke the bridge so I took our big truck and zip—right across the road. He came back in to get another load and I said, "Sorry, the road's closed." So he took us to court. Well, he lost.

The next one who took us to court was Dennis Wise when he took over the ESRO site. And he lost. Because none of those people ever put any money into the road. Everybody says it's a sore spot with me but if you've ever walked five miles down and back two miles of road, it'd be a sore spot with you. All my young years are in that road.

N: What did you do with all that land you cleared?

C: Oh, we raised potatoes for probably ten years.

B: Did you belong to one of the Co-ops?

C: Yeah, we belonged to the one that owned the root cellar that Pete Aiken bought, on the old Steese.

B: Lee (Risse) mentioned "co-ops". Was the other one the Matanuska Co-op?

C: But it was just for milk—and the vegetables. They had refrigeration for vegetables. We'd take our cabbage and carrots, there. Mostly we sold to Ft. Wainwright.

N: Did you have milk cows or chickens?

C: I did, yeah. I had a couple of milk cows.

A: How many head did (Lynn) Funk run?⁸

C: Oh, he at one time ran probably twenty-five or thirty. He had quite a dairy going. We never tried for dairying. It wasn't something my husband wanted to do. The cows wouldn't let him milk them, anyway.

⁷ Carl Lindstrand homesteaded near 6 M.

⁸ Lynn Funk had a dairy at 4½ M.

I guess his hands were too rough with them or something. You could just see their poor old teats shrink. They'd hold that milk. They would not let it go for him. I could go out and they were streaming by the time I said two words to them.

B: Was there farming in your background? You learned all this after you got up here?

C: My husband was the type of person who, if he wanted to know something, would go get a book, sit down and read it and he'd go do it. He could retain whatever he read, so he decided he wanted to do potatoes. And of course, we knew Bert Stimple and Bert gave us a lot of pointers. I worked for Bert for three or four years before we started potatoes.

B: That was at his place on Steele Cr. Rd. or on his job? He was what? An ag inspector?

C: Not until later, not until five years before he left, is all. Before that he never did anything but farm. I was his field crew chief. I kinda oversaw the field, saw that there were sacks and made sure there were other things. Then, of course, I picked, too.

B: Lee was telling some stories on Bert.

C: Oh, I've got some stories. You'd just die. One time, I thought to myself, "I'm going to get back at this man," because he'd come out with the potato inspector and I'd made this angel food cake, with the hole in the middle, and that Bert Stimple sat there and flicked his ashes in the middle of this cake. I was furious. So we shot this bear and I took this bear's paw and I skinned it and salted it all down and laid it on a piece of paper in a box, and it looked just like a human hand. Then I put it in the mailbox and sent it to his post office box. I wasn't there when he got it, but a friend was and she said Bert opened the box and screamed. And threw it in the garbage. Everybody in the building was going over and looking in this box. I thought, "Well, that's one. I've got about fifty to go."

He didn't like snakes. Everytime he'd do something to me, I'd say, "I'm going to get back at you, one of these days! You don't like snakes, so one of these days---." One day he got a package in the mail. It was long, so wide, not very deep. He looked at that and there was no return address. He thought, "Cora sent me a snake," because I had just come back from outside. "She sent me a snake, I'm sure she sent me a snake." So he took that box home, put it in a bucket of water and left it there for a week. Finally, we were over there one day and he said, "You think you pulled one on me but you didn't. I'll show you what I did with it." I said, "I don't know what you're talking about," and I didn't. He went over to that bucket of water and pulled that thing out and said, "I drowned it." He opened this thing up and it was a hand-painted tie from his brother in California, a beautiful hand painted tie.

B: Do you know Bob Straight?

C: Oh, yeah. I know Bob Straight really well.

B: Why did he carry a pistol?

C: Oh, he was just paranoid, like the rest of us.

N: Did you carry a pistol?

C: No, but I had a gun inside the front door. I used to be scared back there, you know, all by myself. Guys, GI's, would come back there and target practice and things. It would scare me to death because they wouldn't always know the house was there. This one day, a car came up and there were four men in it and it scared me silly. They got out and stood there looking around and I didn't know what to do. So I had this 30.06 and Bob said to keep it there by the door. He said, "Use it if you have to." One of

them came over to the door, just looking around. The door was about that thick, it was an old refrigerator door that my husband had cut down, and put on the log cabin and it was real short. I have done in more politicians than you can shake a stick at. Because they didn't duck.

This guy stood there at the door for a few minutes so I reached over and picked up this 30.06. He turned around and said something to one of the guys and kinda took a step back and when he did I just took my foot and kicked the door open and stood there with the gun like this and he gave a gasp and threw his hands up and said, "Oh, lady, I'm not after anything. We just didn't know where the road went to." I said, "Well, now you know. You've got about five seconds to get out of here." And they all got in the car and left. It was the only time I ever had to do that, but I was so scared, I didn't know what was coming out there.

N: Were there a lot of crimes against people by strangers?

C: No, there was a lot of people coming and just pilfering. Especially the old cabins, like that old one on Foster's place. The still that was back there. It was a perfectly good, working still and I don't know what happened to it. One day it just turned up missing. We left it there because it was so cute.

When we first moved out there, we were on Foster's property because we couldn't get over to our place. Funk had logged back here and there was a big huge pile of logs laying right on the corner, in the way. It was a huge pile of logs, just rotting. Gorgeous logs, this big around. He had pulled them up there and was going to take them over and build a house but he never did.

B: That was when he still owned the Maranatha property?

C: Funk? Did he own the Maranatha?

B: Supposedly, that's where he homesteaded originally. I don't know if he proved up or not.

C: Really. He wasn't there when we came. I've never researched that property. I've researched all of ESRO Rd. property, on both sides.

A: Who was the guy at the land office that was always at the front desk?

C: Began with an "H", Hess or Hodges—something like that. (*Bowman Hinkley*)

A: For my money, he was an absolute genius when it came to any government property.

C: Yeah, Robert went out and picked his brain a lot. He was a really nice guy.

B: Did you know the Riedel's?

C: They were out here a year or two before us.

N: Mattie Lee Herning said she had a lot of bachelors she kind of took care of. Did you end up with bachelors that you were always kind of mothering?

C: Yeah, sort of. McQuinn, he was always over to the house. George Dornath was always over to the house. My husband liked to play chess. There were about five of them got together to play chess.

N: And you're referring to your little cabin. I mean, three babies, you and a couple men in the house---

C: It was a house for everything. You know, in those days, if a calf got down, even the heifers, they didn't want to bother with them.

B: You're talking about dairying people?

C: Yeah, they'd get ahold of me and I'd go over and get these calves. I don't know, I could just bring them out of it, but the men didn't want to bother. So one day, I went over to Joe Lawlor's and he had this little calf that was out of his best milker. And he said, "She's been down three days and I don't want to bother with her." She was about four days old.

We had these logs going across the middle of the house and I put a rope down and made her a sling out of a burlap sack and stuck her legs through and then I started nursing her. Her legs just hung, she wouldn't try to stand. It took about a week, then one night we heard her pawing her feet and the kids, everybody, jumped out of bed. I taught that cow to come to me when I whistled, like a dog. I sold her to Bushy⁹ because she was good stock and Bushy wanted her. She threw twins every year and became the best milker in the Tanana Valley. I could still go over five years later and call her and she'd come.

N: Where were you getting feed for these cattle?

C: Right there, on our farm. We raised potatoes, then we had about twenty acres of hay.

A: What equipment did you use to harvest hay?

C: I have an old rake that's horse drawn, then we had a sickle-mower, then we just shocked the oats. I had one of those little mechanical shockers and I just sold it to Bernie Karl. It's now in the Chena Hot Springs Road Museum. All those pieces are. Everything I had is out there from the time we got here. Robert never sold anything.

B: What kind of hay did you grow?

C: Oats. And that's what we raised over here. We bought an Ag parcel near 8 mile.¹⁰ It was 480 acres. For about ten years we raised certified seed oats over here. I had to sell it recently. That whole Potlatch Ponds¹¹ stuff is a bunch of garbage. That's the best ground in the state of Alaska for growing oats and peas and that sort of thing....

B: Who'd you sell it to?

C: A guy off McGrath Rd., Frank Dye. He just wants to farm, so he bought the machinery and everything. Ours was one of the Two Rivers parcels (*as opposed to the Potlatch Pond parcels*). There is such a potential up here for agriculture, but it will never grow because of the control that Washington and other states have over Alaska.

B: Did you know Harry Denton?

C: Yeah, you couldn't go down to the creek and get water without seeing Harry Denton. He was a character and a half. We always thought he had a screw loose, but he didn't. He was just real opinionated, but he loved kids. Harry was a nice man, actually.

B: Such a bunch of bachelors....Joe Kruger, Denton, Bob Straight, McQuinn, Bohnet.

⁹ Marvin Bushey was dairying at 5 M on the Old Steese.

¹⁰ "Ag parcels" are state lands available only for agricultural purposes.

¹¹ Potlatch Ponds is an area now set aside as wet lands.

N: Where did these guys find their wives?

C: McQuinn married a woman from Germany. She kinda took him for everything he had. This was later, probably in the eighties. Bob just never did get married.

B: Tilly was obviously born in Germany or somewhere over there. Do you know anything about her background? Did they come up to Fairbanks as a couple?

C: Yeah. It wasn't until about '55 or '57 that they decided to split the homestead. And it was only because they couldn't live together.

B: They got along fine once they separated.

C: They did. They were back and forth. She went and helped him and he helped her.

Louie Burdon was a bachelor. We took care of Louie, all the time. He died from a bee sting. Louie had been up here, out of the military, two years. He was in his early forties and he didn't even know he was allergic to them until one day he got stung and he came down to the house and he was all swollen. I said, "What happened to you?" And he said, well he didn't know, a bee stung him. I said, "You get to the doctor, get there NOW." And the doctor told him to keep this kit with him.

He usually came down to the house on Sunday morning and sat and drank coffee with my husband and he didn't come. So Bob said, "I've got to go up this afternoon and see about Louie. He went up and met Bruce (*Ehrens*) who bought this piece of property from Pete Aiken. At the end of the porch, Louie had built up a place to plant onions and things and we think he was out there pulling weeds and stirred up the bees or something. He died of throat restriction.

A: Your husband was a sheet metal man? He had his training where?

C: Yeah, he took his training in San Francisco. He was only 17, just barely old enough to start his apprenticeship. He finished in three years and went to work for Baird Sheet Metal in Fresno. He died of mesothelioma which is a rare asbestos cancer of the chest cavity. It takes fifteen to forty-five years to develop. I found out he'd been exposed at Municipal Utilities, at Fort Greeley and at Clear. All three of those places used this particular stuff. It's Kalo and Pabco and one other asbestos product that causes it. No other insulation causes that, just these three. When it does explode in the body and becomes active, you have about three months to live. We discovered it in June and he died in October. And it only affects the cavity of the chest, not the lungs. High pressure pipes are wrapped with it.

Like I said, my husband was one of those people who could do anything he wanted to do if he set his mind to it. I now have a full log turning mill, in my tin building. Literally, you put the log on, it turns it, comes back, makes the groove, then it goes down the bench and over here is the drill press that makes the holes on each side, then it rolls it off and is done. And he made it in about two and a half months.

N: He was the kind of guy to homestead in Alaska.

C: That's why he had all that equipment and stuff because he did everything himself. And enjoyed doing it. He's enjoyed making roads. Over on Ballaine Rd., he cut that one through for a guy who was homesteading over there.

.....The hangar was the original root cellar. We had as high as 45 to 60 ton of potatoes in there at one time. Kennebecs and Tetons. If you were going to farm and sell you had to do the Irish potato. The Nantes Coreless are beautiful carrots. They grow really well. And Blue Lake green beans.

I used to have a fair booth and was selling at the fair. I had an interesting discussion with the new Fair Manager, Carl Amstrup. I told him, "You're getting too far away from an agricultural fair and there's plenty of agriculture in Fairbanks to support that fair." I was on this citizen's advisory committee. I said, "How come you don't have the Individual Farm and Gardens display anymore?" He said, "Oh, we never had that. There aren't that many farms." "Well," I said, "I beg to differ with you because there was *(such a display)*." "No, I don't think so, never had one." So the next meeting I brought my trophy that was about this high. On the bottom it said "Individual Farm and Garden, First Place." So I just took it and slapped it down and said, "Now, would you like to discuss this some more?" But I couldn't get them to get back into agriculture.

A: What got me was when Kertulla switched and refused funding to the University for agriculture since, obviously, (the Matsu Valley) was going to be the bedroom community to the Anchorage area, so "we don't need agriculture...." I'd just spent a year getting two big parcels for a red meat program, 5000 acres at Homer and a 10,000 acre chunk on Kodiak Island. And, to my knowledge, they've never had any red meat on them.¹²

C: Well, I've watched agriculture for the last forty years and I've watched it destroyed, piece by piece.... I raised almost two-thirds of an acre of carrots, two-thirds of an acre of beans and an acre of cabbage.... They grew beautifully as long as you prepared the ground for it. To me, one of biggest things they're missing in the state of Alaska is the frozen food market. Our vegetables are the finest you can grow anywhere in the world. If they just had a flash freezer place here, people would grow for it.

A: They had this down in Palmer for awhile, green peas.

C: Peas! What a product to pick when there are so many other products—broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, onions....

N: Since you were involved in agriculture, did you ever get involved with the Koreans and the barley out here on Chena Hot Springs?

C: No. We never cared for barley. After you harvest the oats, the straw is a saleable product, to mushers. They prefer the straw of oats to barley because the barley barbs get in the dogs' fur and bore in and they have to be pulled out. When they found out we were selling oat hay, I couldn't keep the stuff, couldn't keep it on hand. They'd come right to the field and take all the straw I could produce. So we never bothered with barley. And the oats are more nutritional. We'd put in about fifty acres of oat hay and let the rest mature out into seed. Then sell the straw. The straw sold for as much as the baled oats. I just sold last year's crop to the Delta barley farmers.

N: So do you consider yourself a farmer and your husband a sheet metalist?

C: Well, neither. Because you couldn't farm without working, in the state of Alaska. You cannot do it. You have to support that farm somehow. We owned Fairbanks Sheet Metal for twenty years and that's what we did for a living, to feed ourselves, then we farmed because that's what we wanted to do.

We bought our business from Johnny Albright.¹³ When we first came up here, my husband went to work for Johnny Albright. He wanted a sheet metal man but he didn't have any work right then, so he put Bob on the counter. So he'd work him on the counter in the winter time, then when the jobs started opening up, Bob would do sheet metal work for him. After two or three years, Johnny said, "Bob, I don't want to run this shop. You take it over." Of course, we didn't have any money. We were just young kids that

¹² Al George was the University's Director of Lands at that time.

¹³ Johnny Albright owned Samson Hardware.

didn't have a thing. Johnny said, "Go down to the bank and tell Ed¹⁴ I sent you and tell him to lend you the money." So we did and borrowed \$10,000 and bought all Johnny's sheet metal equipment and put it in the back of the store. That was about '57, '56. Then we worked for him until '64, when we opened a sheet metal shop ourselves and ran it until '80-'82. In those days, once you established who you were and what you represented.....

B: And with Johnny Albright behind you. Who you knew helped.

C: Yeah, Johnny just said, "Go tell Ed to give you the money."

Transcribed and edited by Bruth George

I agree to share this material with fellow
interviewees and others interested in local history.

Name and date

¹⁴ Ed Stroecker, President of First National Bank