

ORAL HISTORY
2017-01-06
PT. 1-2

Barbara Dedman-Kalen
12/5/09
Skagway, AK
Skagway Oral History Project

Tape 1

- **Barb:** Born in 1924 to Henry Dedman and Bessie White. Her dad was born in Skagway and her mother came to Skagway as a school teacher in 1921-22. Her mother wanted to get far away from Florida. Her grandfather (Henry's side), born in Missouri, came to Skagway during the gold rush, but did not go to the fields in search of gold. Instead, he started a laundry business, then with a partner bought a building and started the Golden North Hotel. They moved it to Broadway street with "1 horse power." After the gold rush, there were no photographers around, so no photos were taken of the Golden North's move. In 1936 the hotel foreclosed. At this time, the railroad tracks ran down Broadway street, so people had to wait in Skagway to travel in and out of the country. Barbara's father also worked for the F.E. Company in Fairbanks, then the family moved to California during WWII so he could work on ships.
- **Childhood in Skagway:** It was nice and fun living in Skagway- they didn't go up the hill (the military wouldn't let them) so they played in the river and the beach. There was a polliwog and toad pool that they played in as well. In the winter, they played in the snow, ice skated and played at the White Pass athletic club. Hockey was also popular. When Barb was a child, the weather was colder, and there was a lot more snow. They went to Lower Lake to skate, it was about a 15-20 minute hike. Now it isn't cold enough to make ice for skating- tied to global warming? People also grew big gardens. They didn't have tomatoes, but the WWII store had some fresh fruits and vegetables after the war.
- **Family photography:** Her mother was the photographer and started Dedman's Photo Shop. The photos were of local views, postcard framing etc. cameras, and view masters. Barb worked on the Klondike Highway Photography Project in the 1970's; it was a fun job in which she photographed the construction of the highway. The construction crews had a very difficult job. She has some photos and a story in Western Construction Magazine. She used a Practica 12 exposure roll, which had 120 square negatives. She also did local news reporting in Skagway in the 1950's. Her mother's camera is in Juneau at a museum.
- **Employment opportunities for women in Skagway:** There were women around, they owned homes. Photography, the tourism business- fast photo finishing, deep tanks for developing photos. The photos were black and white until after WWII.
- **Skagway was different:** Bobby Sheldon built the first automobile in Skagway, having never even seen one in real life. He drove it to Fairbanks up the Richardson in the 1920's. He based his car off photos in magazines and collected parts to create it. People did things differently then.
- **Other jobs Barb worked:** She worked as a correspondent for Western Construction Magazine, and gave the magazine photos, history and building information. She also worked as a pine cone collector in Iceland. Iceland didn't used to have conifer trees, now they have mostly Alaskan trees. It was the Silver Seed Company in Roy, Washington. "AB Mountain" in Skagway was nicknamed "Squirrel Town."
- **More Childhood:** There were about 100 school kids during her youth. She was an only child. The Army was in town, and Barb says it was devastating to the youth, because whole generation of older teens went off to war. There was a Col. Arons (sp?) who was a horrible man in Skagway. He "thought he was God." The Army had a quonset hut and tent village in town, and they built their own buildings in Skagway and used old barrack buildings. The 375th port battalion was in town, there was a different battalion for the railroad. The Army was preparing

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for a Japanese invasion and hauling materials for the Alaska Highway. Black men were not prevalent in Skagway. There was a Black cook at the hotel. They had only seen Blacks in movies. There were also Tlingit kids in Skagway. But there was soft racism, and it was an unfair situation- there was a separate "Indian Town" for them by the river by 4th and 5th avenue. Whites and Natives didn't associate. Captain William Moore's (founder of Skagway) son Ben married a Native Tlingit. Natives originally did not live in Skagway, mostly in Klukwan and Haines. Skagway was never a Native town. Natives in Skagway worked as fishermen, occasional railroad jobs, and racism began to ease.

- **Homestead in Dyea:** Barb's family homesteaded in Dyea. Her husband got land just at the end of the war, and they built a cabin with old army barracks. The area is only accessible by boat on five acres. They also had to deal with the tide- you tried to land at high tide to get up on the beach, but it was a rocky beach. The area was very pretty.
- **Yuletide Festivals:** Barb grew up with live music- there was no TV or radio. People used to do a lot more music. Skagway and Haines choirs got together and sang "Elijah." They went to Petersburg when the ferry opened. It was always really fun to sing. She had a very musical family, they loved singing Stephen Foster folk songs.
- **High school:** Barb moved with her family to California during WWII for her father's work on Navy ships. She only had one year of high school in California, and she was very active in school. She didn't have money to go to college, but thinks it would have been interesting.

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

- **Public Library in Skagway:** All the current and retired school teachers wanted a library. The Carnegie Foundation gave books and donations, the city contributed. Her mother was one of the founders of the library. They had all the good books- "The Hardy Boys," "Nancy Drew" etc. She loved library books.
- **The Mission School:** Father Gallant was the Catholic priest who was in charge of the school. It was a boarding school and non-Natives could attend. The school is shut down now.
- **Barb's family:** She has four children, all live in Skagway. After the Hotel shut down due to foreclosure, the family stuck to photography.
- **Post War:** Tourism picked up a lot, and now it is huge. Outside money and tour companies bring in cash. She thinks Skagway would rather be a family town than a tourist town. The tourist town is too artificial. There is a summer and winter Skagway.
- **Picnicking in the Wrangell Narrows:** They would canoe to the other side of the narrows and have picnics. One time, they didn't pay attention to the tide- the tide changed, and they spent all afternoon fighting it in the canoe. They eventually made it back home, but it was a long trip! They used to pick blueberries in the White Pass, and men would hunt goats sometimes. They'd also ski at Lower Lake, but cross country. Downhill was too difficult.
- **The Chilkoot Trail:** The trail wasn't really accessible, it was very messy and un-kept. Until the Park Service put in bridges, it was almost impassible.
- **Best part of growing up:** Good schools, comfy small town life...and she's still here. The Arts Council also did a lot to help Skagway, Barb served on the board.

End of Tape 2