

ORAL HISTORY
2017-01-07 PT. 1-2

Dee Mason
December 5, 2009
Juneau Alaska
Skagway Oral History Project
2 Tapes

Tape 1

- **Dee Mason:** Was born in Quarry Pennsylvania on May 21, 1913. She and her husband moved to Skagway on September 10, 1946. Her husband and she were in New York and saw a sign that stated the White Pass Yukon Railroad was hiring, and he filled out applications for anything at the time, railroad oriented. His brother Cliff also got a job in Skagway for the the White Pass in the Shops as a blacksmith. T. C., Dee's husband, worked as a brakeman for the White Pass.
- **Growing up in Pennsylvania:** Her father owned a farm, mom was a school teacher. She had 3 step-siblings, and had a sister and a brother. Her father sold his farm to the city to be used as a country club. Dee went to school, but her mother did not instruct her, she didn't want her kids to get special treatment. Dee did not attend college, after high school she worked for Murphy's 5 and Dime for \$9.00 a week. She worked for Raymond Manufacturer, as a spring maker for 40cents an hour. When she got paid, she gave her mother some money, put a little in the bank. She met her husband in high school. They got married in 1930's.
- **Coming to Skagway:** She was very excited to come to Alaska, so she sold the family's home. It was a ranch type with an apartment. They took the train from Quarry, to Buffalo New York, then they switched engines at the Canadian border to Toronto, then by train to Vancouver. It took 5 days, and it was a nice trip. Her son Tom was about 7, Terry was about 2.5 years. They took the Princess Louise boat to Skagway, it took about 5 days. She met some people from Skagway on the ship, Dorothy Shelby and her two children. She met Father Gallant on the ship as well, he was headed home. She was happy to arrive in Skagway, her sister in law met them on the dock, it was a beautiful day on September 10th.
- **Housing:** They lived on State Street, T.C.'s brother lived on the corner. White Pass didn't provide housing. They lived in one of Mamie Gould's houses by Carl Mulvihill.
- **Life in Skagway:** People all worked, mostly for the White Pass, with the boats, Princess Louise, Princess Nora, the war ships, oil tankers. It was a very busy town, people were nice and friendly. Dee worked as a waitress for Jimmy Patterson at the Skagway Grill. He always said, "Once you close your door on business, you open it up again and you make no money." She also worked for the Sanitarium. There were doctors and nurses there, and they closed and moved it to Sitka. Barbara Kalen might be a person to ask about the Sanitarium. This was different from the railroad hospital. She waitressed for about 3 years for Jimmy, and the restaurant closed down. She didn't even know how to wait on a table, but it was super clean, and she worked hard and knew the locals. Jimmy was kind to her, and gave her advice. He hired the Mission school children to do the dishes. He was a great guy to work for. There was an after school area for young adults so they could hang out in the evenings. The Mission School children went as well.
- **Mission School:** The first Mission school burned down, then the students were in barracks buildings. Father Gallant raised money to re-build the mission. It was a beautiful chapel. She attended church there, her two sons went to school at the Mission because Dee liked the school and wanted them to go there. "You don't sass the Sisters." Dee has 3 children.
- **Raising children:** Dee's husband died young, only around 50 years old, so she raised her three children. When Tom came home from Korea, his father got pneumonia and died. Dee re-married 10 years later, to a real estate agent, Wayne Mulkey, from San Francisco. He was in

- Skagway selling property and worked for Botanical Books as a manager in San Francisco.
- **Future Work: Dee** worked for Benny Lingle at the Skagway Hardware Store, worked as a waitress, worked as a night staff. With the war, work was prevalent. She received many job offers. She worked as a telephone operator in the Army Barracks- city hall, jail and phone company was all in one building. On the corner was the ACS building- telecommunications office.
 - **Telephones in Skagway:** Most people had phones in Skagway. As a phone operator, she answered phone, worked switchboard, transferred calls. She could have listened in on calls, but it wasn't her business. After working for the phone company, she decided she wanted to stay home at nights.
 - **The Golden North Hotel:** Dee worked as a waitress for the Golden North, it was very nice. Each room had a different furnishing, and was named for families in Skagway. She knows the people that owned it, the Dedmans, they sold it to the Kapanskis, and then they sold it to the Soldines. They're old families. It was a nice place, people enjoyed the food, it was well maintained. When tourist season started, it became a tourist hotel. Chuck West started the tourist business. She served all kinds of food as a waitress. Everything was home-made. Bill Feero opened up the Sourdough Inn. People expanded their restaurants as time went on. Dee enjoyed waitressing- she enjoyed the people, the conversations and the work.
 - **Fun in Skagway:** The Eagles and the Elks Lodges. Dee belonged to the Eagles, a 10 year secretary. They have a family night, and they had a potluck dinner. You brought along your kids, and it was fun. People don't really do this anymore. The Eagles was around 116 years old when she was active, but she's not sure how the Eagles got to Skagway. They didn't have historical events. Its a family organization, like the Moose Club and families would attend events together.
 - **T.C. Working for Railroad:** People socialized all over town. It was fun, people neighbored. They had a train ride to Glacier to pick moon berries that ran every year. You took your kids and it was great fun. There was also a midnight picnic- you could walk over the bridge to the point, or Smuggler's Cove and picnic. They lugged a piano to Smuggler's Cove.
 - **Smuggler's Cove:** Smuggler's Cove was always fun- the Mission Sisters would take the 5th-7th grade students to Lower Lake, and have marshmallows and picnic. The kids had a good time. The Sisters were Amy, Florence. They did a great job.
 - **Arriving in Skagway:** Being a newcomer was not so special. Her brother-in-law and his wife were there, they fit right in with them. Ma Pullen was still alive when Dee arrived. She used to host tea in the afternoons, and told stories about Alaska and her career. Mrs. Rasmusson, who owned the bank, they came back to Skagway in the summer and she hosted ladies tea. There were a few Natives, very good people. Maggie Codonle,(sp?) made moccasins and sold them. She felt that Skagway was a very good place to be. There weren't too many Native people at the time. The Natives and non-natives interacted, it was nice. They lived right in town with everyone else, by where the old ACS building was. "Indian Town"- not a term Dee heard of.
 - **Changes in Skagway:** The old people are gone. People act differently now, especially the young people, the Clubs and Lodges. There is no class anymore. Tourism has been good for Skagway, and it has changed through the years. They used to meet the train with Days of '98 clothes. They took their kids over to meet the train with tourists. Dee was never a Can Can dancer. The Days of '98 Can Can dance show was great, back in the day. Now the show is commercialized, and it's not the same. Tourists increased shortly after Dee arrived in Skagway. By the 1950's it really started. The docks started opening, the tourist ships came more often, and the ferry system started up. The ferry system was a big help to the town, it used to be first class all the way. Then it "went down the tube." Before the ferries, people came in on boats- the boats were from Vancouver. Alaska Coastal Airways was also in business in the 1950's. The Army

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was still in Skagway when Dee arrived. The Army never really bothered her, there were barracks buildings, but she didn't have much contact with the men.

- **Move to Juneau:** Dee moved to Juneau in 1968, her family wanted her to move to Juneau. The kids were older, and her family wanted her to come. Dee worked at Barrens (sp?) Store for 2 years. Then she worked for The Prospector. She was going to retire, but she kept getting job offers. She worked on weekends because she didn't know as many people in Juneau. She lived in the McKennan Apartments, and many good people lived in the McKennan Apartments, including past governors and other politicians. You had to have references and referrals to live there. She lived there for 15 years.

End Tape 1

Tape 2

- **The best thing about living in Skagway:** People! They were friendly, and there for you. People were helpful, and cared for each other.
- **The hardest thing about living in Skagway:** She knew they were headed to Skagway, and she sold her things and took off. She never had any hard times living in Skagway, they always had access to other places outside of Skagway.
- **Visiting Whitehorse:** There was a winter carnival in Whitehorse, and people would take the train and their children over. People used to take the train often to Whitehorse, now they just drive. People came to Skagway to fish, and the fishing is good. Many people in the area have boats, and they used to go crabbing and shrimping as well.
- **Skagway was a great place to raise kids:** They would take the kids camping out at Lower Lake, hike and go out on the water. Now that tourists came, they took over. Kids can't go play like they used to- tourists ruined the hiking/camping areas. Kids couldn't get into as much trouble in Skagway as they could in big cities. This has changed a little.
- **The first winter in Skagway:** It got down to -20, and her husband was working on the railroad. The men didn't come home over night, and she could hear the whistle but didn't know where he was. She had hung blankets over the doors, and they all gathered into the living room for warmth. They had an oil heater, and a Yukon Stove, but they could only keep the living room warm. Morning came, and Mickey Mulvihill was outside. She found out the men in the train were in Bennett, and it would take 5 days to get home. He arrived home at night and pounded on the door, and Dee made him come in the back door because the front door was so blocked off. She did what she had to do. They all had army parkas, so they all matched. They were always too big, and no one could recognize each other. They also had army blankets, because the army was leaving, and they left everything behind.
- **The Pack Train:** The bar- the center of activity. They used to gamble in the back room. They did the city business there, the sheriff George Rapuzzi, Pat Carol the mayor, they'd go in and play cards. You had to get the men out of the Pack Train to pay your city bills. There was a lot of fun and good people there. Through the years it has changed.
- Many of the old places in town have closed down, or changed hands. Only a few places are left, like the Red Onion.

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