

ORAL HISTORY 2019-01-05

Mike Dalton with Libby Dalton present

November 24, 2018

Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen Brewster, interviewer

Series: Kathleen "Mike" Dalton Life History Recordings

Mike Dalton said she wanted to talk about the formation of the Pioneer group. She and three other people formed the group at the mouth of the Fortymile River. They were the Arctic Sisterhood. Brewster and Dalton look at a photograph of their group on Fairbanks Creek. Present in the photo are Jack Williams, Vuka Stepovich, Alaska Linck, Mike Dalton and Ken Murray. The four people to start the group were Vuka Stepovich, Alaska Linck, Mike Dalton and Crystal Morgan. A couple of times after hiking a trail they would have a reunion and talk about their trip.

Mike Dalton talked about Susie Swain. Swain used to live at the bottom of the hill where the university staircase is now located. Next door to Swain was Earl Beistline and the Donald Cook family. Swain passed away two or three days ago. She was 95 and made of steel. She was a community activist in College. She was a little lady. Every year they had clean-up day in Fairbanks. The community of College started clean-up day forty or fifty years ago and Swain would organize that. Swain was a member of the college women's club and they would organize events. Swain would pick up trash there at university corner. Swain's husband worked at the agricultural station at the university. He also picked up trash, too. This was before the borough organized. It was legally organized on January 1, 1964. Susie and her husband lived in a dried cabin at university corner. They are gone now.

The day of statehood everyone at town celebrated. Ben Atkinson, Vince Magnus, and Jim Cox were all friends. She went downtown during statehood celebrations in a truck with a friend. Atkinson, Magnus and Cox were drinking in celebration and ran out of alcohol. It was suggested they break their glasses. They ran out of glasses to break. They thought they would break all the windows in the cabin. They decided to break the television set in the cabin. Dalton said there were some really good parties in celebration. Dalton said Susie Swain got the word out to go to Vince's cabin and pick up the mess. The College Women's Club created the city clean-up day. The children would get a reward after they helped. Dalton and her two children would pick up trash in their neighborhood. The clean-up day exists today. Swain was involved with the Tanana Valley Fair. The College Women's Club had an annual salmon dinner at the fair. She talked about the homemade food they served made from local ingredients. They used to have ice cream with homemade blueberry sauce with blueberries picked by members of the club. Dalton talked about cooking the blueberry sauce. The dinner was a fund raiser for the women's club. They had different committees for the different components of the dinner. This was a project started by Susie Swain. Dalton listed members of the College Women's Club: Susie Swain, Dorothy Beistline, Cora Cook, Cathy Jones, Mary Binkley, Mike Dalton, Rusty Heltin, Doreen (worked at the post office), and Connie Griffith. Griffith had been a teacher who went outside for law school. Griffith was deeply involved in the arts. Griffith's son was one of the mechanics for the Riverboat Discovery. Dalton talked about the Binkley's house on University. The house is now a veterinary clinic. The Binkley's property went back to the slough. The first Discovery Riverboat was a small boat. Dalton talked about the Quonset hut on the

Binkley's property. John Binkley wanted to ride his motorcycle from Prudhoe to the tip of South America during the pipeline days. Dalton said he wouldn't get permission from Alyeska. She was working for Senator Stevens at the time and the Haul Road was still private. Binkley called up Dalton again. Ed Patton was the head of Alyeska construction. Dalton would organize VIP gatherings. One gathering was to meet and greet President Ford. Dalton stood next to Ed Patton at the gathering and asked him for permission for Binkley to get into Prudhoe Bay. Dalton told Patton about the Binkley family. Patton said no. Dalton told Binkley about the bad news. The Quonset hut was used for gatherings. John decided to ride in a Hercules plane as a backup plan. Neal Bergh is discussed. Binkley went to the airport with his motorcycle. Dalton talked about the loadmaster for one of the planes. Binkley was able to get on one of the planes. Dalton told Binkley to call him when he got back to town and she met up with him. Binkley ended up riding his bike to the tip of South America. This was during 1975.

Dalton continued to talk about Susie Swain. Dalton said they helped a lot at the fair. They would knit and sew for the fair. Dalton said when the phone rang and it was Susie it was a project coming.

Dalton said Swain was trained as a nurse and did a lot of volunteer nursing. During WWII she was a register Army nurse. At one point Swain was stationed in North Africa. She nursed on a ship. Swain would travel to the Italian coast and pick up patients. Swain met her husband on a Navy ship. After the war the Swains married and came to Alaska. The Swains had three boys. Any time there was an emergency Swain would be the nurse. Every spring there was a demand for medical help on the Yukon. Swain spearheaded the drive to create fun time park on College Road. They held picnics there. They were located outside the boundary of the city. When they needed utilities they would meet with the city. People in the College area did not want to be included in the city. When the area became a borough they were incorporated. Dalton said Swain was a very modest person and was always busy with some kind of home crafts.

Karen Brewster asked about the Arctic Sisterhood. Dalton said a lot of people she knows belong to the Pioneers of Alaska. They preserve the history and relics of the past. A lot of them had been to Dawson and were interested in the history. Arctic Brotherhood was a name they heard about. Dalton talks about their trip to the Fortymile and Yukon River to celebrate Crystal Morgan's birthday. Somewhere during that trip they decided to form the Arctic Sisterhood. Dalton made sashes with AS for Arctic Sisterhood. Crystal Morgan lived in Berkeley in a house built by Morgan's father. The purpose of their club was social and more. Dalton talked about their Fortymile trip. They used a guide. The Arctic Sisterhood had trips together such as up to Prudhoe Bay. Dalton talked about getting permission to go through security. They got all the way out to Oliktok Point. This was in 1989. Brewster and Dalton look at a photo display from the trip. One of the security people asked them how they got permission to be up there. Dalton told him that one of the people in their group had a lot of British Petroleum stock. Libby said they went to the Aleutians and Russia. They decided to allow other women to join. The requirements were living in Alaska twenty years at least or you had to shoot a bear or a river trip on the Yukon River or had to hike the Chilkoot Trail. They would meet every once in a while including in Alaska Link's backyard. Dalton talked about Jack Williams and Ken Murray's RCMP uniforms. Every once in a while they would camp out on Fairbanks Creek. Jack Williams and Ken Murray showed up at their camp in uniform to "arrest" one of the campers, Vuka Stepovich. Stepovich didn't recognize them right away. She said she has a lot of good memories about their group. The youngest member of their group met the requirements because she shot a bear. Laurie Miscovich was mining up near Coldfoot with her family. Her father had told her to have a rifle or pistol. Miscovich walked out their boardwalk to their meat storage and saw a

grizzly. She had a 357 and shot it and killed it. Dalton said most of the members had been in Alaska for a long time. They get together yearly for a reunion on Fairbanks Creek. The miners who mine out there join them. There are about a dozen members of the club. Libby is a member of the club, too. In 2015 they went to Prudhoe Bay and came back with Arctic Ocean water they use in club initiation. Dalton said she went out to the Aleutians a couple of years and the Sisterhood came out there to visit. She was working in the Aleutians to organize a reunion of WWII soldiers who had been stationed out there. She was working for the city of Unalaska. The city and a couple of the canneries hosted the reunion. About 150 to 200 veterans came for the reunion. It was an emotional time for them and a lot of them hadn't seen each other since the war. The GIs were part of one battalion from Arkansas. There were soldiers from Alabama. The soldiers were given a choice to go to the Aleutians or to the South Pacific. The reunion was in 1992. One person from Arkansas was the unofficial spokesperson for the group. Their commander would not give permission to use their cargo plane to come up to Alaska so they came up on a Mississippi plane. They flew to Anchorage and then took a charter plane.

Dalton said when Katrina hit the south Susie Swain went down with the Red Cross at the age of 90. Libby said Susie Swain would teach knitting on cruise ships.