

ORAL HISTORY 85-28

Edna Lawson

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Tanana Yukon Historical Society

Edna Lawson talked about how her mother and father came to Fairbanks. Her father, William Frederick Kramer was raised in Germany. He traveled to Missouri and worked on a farm. He gradually moved to Seattle and worked there for two years. When he heard about the gold rush in Dawson he decided to move there. He traveled with many other men and women to Skagway in 1897. He prospected there in the summer and fall. He left for the winter. He traveled back by the Chilkoot Pass and the Dyea trail in the spring of 1898. Her mother Catherine Sherlock was born in near Dublin, Ireland. She had a sister who had come to the U.S. much earlier and settled in Dawson with her husband. Katherine moved to Dawson in 1902. It took her thirty days to travel to Dawson. She worked for her sister for a while and then worked as a governess. Katherine and William met at a social dance. They were known to be good dancers. They might drive forty miles to go to a dance. By 1904 her father decided to come to Fairbanks. He and his uncle, Ed Ross bought property. Her father and Bob Hagan opened a cigar store and ice cream parlor. It was on First and Second Ave across from the co-op. The city later bought part of the property. He also had a beer garden in the summer. His father sent for Katherine and they were married. Ed's wife Ellen also came. Her father had bought a bit of property between Fifth and Sixth on Wickersham. Her parents were married on March 6, 1906 in the Presbyterian Church that is now located in Pioneer Park. Edna was born December 25, 1908. She was born in a little cabin on Wickersham. They were expecting a boy and had the name Edward picked out, but changed the name to Edna. The cabin was too small after her twin sisters were born. Her father found another home on the corner of First and Killum. Her brother was born in 1911. It had been built by Judge Killum. The house next door was owned by Ann Shick. Ann was a caterer who often brought food to their house. Her twin sisters were born in St. Joseph's hospital. During spring break up the ice was quite spectacular. The Chena River bridge would go out every year. Her parents had to cross by ferry to get to the hospital. They were surprised to have twins. Later a steel bridge was built across the Chena River. There was also a bridge across the Noyes Slough. The bridge there would go out every year too. The NC Company owned all the utilities. Every day they would blow the whistle throughout the day at 6, 7 in the morning, 12 noon and 6 at night. The whistles were also used for fires. Her father's property was not burned during the big fire in 1906. The whistle would determine where the fire was located. The city wasn't very large at that time. The NC Company also had a skating rink on the Chena. They had electric lights and music. In front of their family home they had a rink on the river. They would clear snow off the ice so they could skate. They also looked forward to the ice carnival and the big parade. They chose a pioneer queen and king. They had a pageant, too. The city would decorate the streets and the stores. Louie Johnson was the electrician at that time. There were sculptors who would create animals out of the ice. People would enjoy coming downtown to see the sculptures. On the last night of the carnival they would have fireworks. They had a good view of the dog races. They always took off on the rivers. After Fort Wainwright was built it wasn't safe to hold the festivities on the river. They held fundraising for the hospital. Her

teacher, Susan Irwin directed part of the show. They held the show in the moose hall which was located at Second and Wickersham. They held dances there, too. Vic Brown was known for his singing. Her father made a large sleigh for the family for Sunday rides. Edna explained how her mother would wash clothes. They all attended the school at 8<sup>th</sup> and Cushman. They walked to school every day. They also walked back home for lunch. When it was -20 they could take their lunch to school. They had a lot of cold weather at that time. They had a celebration on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June. There was a big parade that started on Second Ave. All the stores were closed and everyone took part in the parade. It was just around the city area. Later on the parade went out to Weeks Field where the ball parks were located. They had tug-of-war competitions. At the baseball park they had car and horse races. That is where Edna learned to drive a car. She graduated from high school in 1927 with a class of 13 students. There were 11 boys and two girls. Jean Bunnell was the other girl in the class. She still owns a graduation present that was made from gold from Ruby. She attended the university and rode the trolley car to the university. There was only one administration building. They also had a men's and women's dorm. Only people from outside of Fairbanks could live in the dorms. Many times they had to break trail up to the university. She played basketball during the winters of 1927 and 1928. The men's basketball team travelled to Juneau on a steamship. They met Jeff Studdart on the boat. Vince Clark was the coach for the girl's team. They met the boy's team in Seward. They were stuck in Seward because of a bad snowstorm. They put on a show at a theater to pay for their expenses. The train stopped in Curry and they had a big banquet for them. The college also had a banquet when they returned home. She was in college until 1930. She was offered a job as a telephone operator by Mr. Weir. Margaret Brandt was another one of the telephone operators. She knew where everyone was located in town. Edna worked from ten at night until eight in the morning. It was a long shift. She worked on swing shift, too and attended college. In the summer of 1929 she also worked for Pacific Alaska Airways. Some of the other phone operators were Eva Collins, Nettie Cronquist and Agnes Herring. She married and had a son, Richard. He attended school in Fairbanks. She worked as a bookkeeper in 1938. She also had worked at the Northern Commercial Company. In 1940 she worked for the Fairbanks Medical and Surgical Clinic until her daughter Jeanine was born. She also worked for the school district. She was a secretary at Hunter School. She later worked at Barnette and Nordale Schools. She later worked full time at Barnette School for fourteen years and retired in 1974. Unidentified person asked about her mother's journey to Dawson. Edna said it took her thirty days for the trip. Someone from the audience asked about the ice pool. Edna said it was just like the Nenana pool. They used to have minute pools. She won one year. One of her sister's won the Nenana pool in the 1940s. She talked about several photos that brought. She talked about the first trip she took Outside. She had a difficult time with seasickness. In 1981 she and her sisters took their mother to Ireland for a visit. Internal problems in the country cut their trip short. One sister lives in Seward and her other sister and brother live Outside. She talks about her son and his family.