

## **Summary for H87-82-22**

**Esther Hall is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 5/10/85**

SIDE 1

Gayle Maloy interviews Esther Hall in Fairbanks, AK on 5/9/85; the interview is aired on 5/10/85. Hall was born August 31, 1898, in Douglas, AK. Her father worked in Treadwell Mine's mills, in the cyanide plant, and in the refinery. He was born in England. He married in Tacoma, WA, to a woman who belonged to the same lodge he did. They moved to Sitka just after the Russians left.

Hall's mother was given a set of dishes by a merchant, which had scenes of old Sitka on them, as a wedding present. They're still in the family, and very precious to it. Her granddaughter has just taken them into her home.

Hall's mother was a housewife. Karen Sather was her maiden name. Hall had a sister who died very young, and a brother. He had a furnishing business in Juneau for many years before he passed away—his name was James Douglas Oliver (Doug). Esther Clara Oliver was Hall's maiden name. Her mother's best friend was named Clara, that's how she got that as a middle name. Her brother was older than her, and her little sister died of T.B. (she was married with children when she died).

In Douglas, Hall went through grade school and high school. When she was 16 she went to Bellingham Normal School. She also had a couple semesters at the University of Washington, but she got married and didn't finish. That was when psychology first came in as a field of study.

The Normal School granted teaching certificates. Hall had always wanted to be a teacher. She'd pretend she was one every day after school, with a long skirt and some old schoolbooks of her father's. Her mother also had two nieces who were schoolteachers.

She enjoyed teaching as an adult, always in very small places. Eska was an interesting place. The miners built the school, and there was a dance celebration. She got lots of attention since she was the young schoolteacher. It was a coal mining camp. You took a train from Anchorage through the Matanuska Valley up toward the mountains. They supplied coal to the battleships.

Everyone from Eska later transferred to Chickaloon, including her. The government built about a dozen homes high on a hill; they climbed 80 steps to get there. The mess halls and offices were down next to the railroad tracks. Her school was in a house, with about 12 kids, at different grade levels. She was always grateful when they passed their exams.

Hall's first teaching assignment had been at Perseverance, near Juneau. They started the school year after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, because in the winter they were afraid of snow slides and people had to move away. From December to March there was no school there. When WWI came, they closed that gold mine town; there was no longer money to maintain it.

To get to Douglas, she had to get in a cage and go down to the bottom of the mine, and ride in a train car to the top of a mountain, where she sat on a cable car, which went down to the dock. From there, she'd take the ferry home, on the weekends.

She made \$100/month and felt pretty rich.

The streets were just being laid in Anchorage when she went through on her way to Eska, around 1919 or so. It was a very little town then. There weren't many cars or trucks in AK back then, says Hall. When she taught at Eska coal mine, she used to go in and shop in Anchorage for a weekend.

When she graduated from Normal School she was 20. L. D. Henderson was the commissioner of education. When she was teaching school she'd wear her hair in a long braid. Sometimes she'd divide it and wear it wrapped around her head. She had yards of ribbon that she used to barrette into her hair. She never considered teaching outside of AK. She used to wear plaid pleated skirts, jersey suits and blouses, and dresses, when she was teaching. She didn't wear slacks. Little girls wore little washable dresses like they do now.

She dated young men while she was teaching, but she wasn't that interested. There were movies and dances. Treadwell had everything, including a big swimming pool.

She tells about the Treadwell cave-in, and a book that recounts it. Hall's father (and everyone) was put out of work. Her parents moved out to Seattle (her sister was also ill at this time). During the WWII years her father was a watchman on the docks, but never worked after that. Hall always has been sorry they left AK; she thinks her parents were never really that happy Outside.

When her husband was a legislator, Hall went to Douglas several times. The house she'd grown up in had been torn down, and everything had changed. Hall taught 4 years before she got married.

When she met Dixie (John B.) Hall she didn't like him very well. She had lots of men friends; they all lived closely in Eska. Hall was entirely different from anyone she'd ever known. On the other hand, there was an older man with lots of money who wanted to marry her (Terry). She said she didn't want to marry anybody, but then turned around and married Dixie Hall. He was clerk of the court in Fairbanks for many years, and a very outgoing man.

One time, they were crossing a creek going on a picnic. She slipped while walking across the log, and down she went. Dixie laughed at her and she was very angry. This was before they were dating.

He was very charismatic, funny, and well liked. She felt quite flattered that he even wanted her. She didn't care that Dixie didn't have a lot of money like Terry.

She was very spoiled and had a lot of attention at Eska, which she wasn't used to. Her brother had made her life miserable by making fun of her big feet. She's always been self-conscious about them.

Dixie made out the payrolls at Eska. When he realized he didn't know anything about mining, Terry McGown (Hall's boyfriend at the time) gave him a job in the mine. They'd all have coffee and cake. Hall never pulled down the shades.

## SIDE 2

Hall married in 1922. She was 24 and her husband was 30. They married in Anchorage, since Hall didn't want to take time off from teaching to go to Douglas. They went together for about 2 years before marrying.

They made a home Chickaloon, and Dixie went to work for the N.C. Co. First he worked in the Nenana store, and was then transferred to Bethel. Their sons were very young at this time. Hall's sons are John Barbie Hall, elder, and Robert Lee Hall, 2 years younger. They lived in Bethel for about 4 years.

Then Dixie came to work in the marshal's office in Fairbanks. (He later worked in the clerk of the court's office until retirement.) The Democrats came into power, and Dixie was a good Democrat. Tony Diamond, the representative in Washington, DC, talked to Dixie in Bethel and told him about the job in the marshal's office. So he became a marshal (law-enforcement officer). He could arrest people. There wasn't as much crime then, of course, says Hall.

They lived on Cushman St., which wasn't paved then. Dixie sprinkled the outside of the house and street with water every day during the summer, or else everything would get so dusty and dirty "you couldn't live."

They had an old Model A. They used to go camping every weekend in the summer. They had a tent, but usually just slept outdoors.

Hall never taught again after she was married. Dixie didn't want her to. He was on the school board for many years, so he didn't want to give his wife a job, Hall laughs. She raised the boys, and did all the housework. When she was first married, she washed clothes by hand. The first time she did it, in Nenana, the line broke (over the potato patch) and all the clothes got muddy and she had to wash them again. She felt like quitting being married and going back to teaching. She later got a washing machine, though.

When they arrived in Fairbanks, they moved into a 2-story house. There were two little girls across the street. Hall knew their mother, Elizabeth, whose father was Dr. Wilny, who had delivered Hall's kids. The girls would put on their father's undershirts and come over to play Hall's piano. One of them is a professor at UAF now.

Hall belonged to the PEO Sisterhood, the Historical Society, and other groups. Since she's had bad legs she hasn't gone to anything. Marge Hagglund belongs to all of them, though, so she gives Hall the low-down.

Fairbanks in the early years: Life was very simple. When you went to dances, you knew everybody. You dressed up in evening clothes. People had dinners at their homes and invited others over, instead of going out to restaurants. The Model Café was about the only place to eat out at.

They went to the Empress Theater, which sometimes featured musicians from outside. One time a young opera singer came out drunk, and they had to ask whether a doctor was in the house, and remove him from the stage. The other half of the act, a young woman, finished the concert without him. Everyone was flabbergasted when he staggered out on stage.

During WWII, Esther walked the streets during blackouts to survey for lights showing. She thinks if the Russians attacked now, AK would be the first place they'd strike.

Hall's son Robert went into the Navy. The other son went in the merchant marine. He couldn't join the military because his eyesight was too poor. This was during the war years.

Russians stayed very much to themselves when they were in Fairbanks during WWII. The only thing they were interested in was the weapons, says Hall, though they also bought lots of things from the local jewelry stores.

Hall was very close to Dr. Noble Dick and his wife, Eleanor. They had two children, Dickie and Caroline, who were friends of her boys. Now Caroline has two kids and lives in Fairbanks, and Dick has three kids and lives in Anchorage. Dr. Dick was an eye/ear/nose/throat specialist. They later moved to CA. After Dr. Dick died, Hall used to go down and stay with Eleanor.

Hall doesn't go out much anymore, since she can't get around. When she moved in at the Pioneer Home, she never intended to stay. When she got better though, she decided it's a pretty nice place to stay. Dr. Rebar sent her to the Home to recuperate.

Dixie was a clerk at the court. He started with one girl helping, and as the town grew, a few more girls had to be hired. They were located in the Federal Building.

Dixie told her one's wife shouldn't come to her husband's office. When she needed money, she'd ask Dave Adler to borrow some, and tell him to collect the debt from Dixie. It made her mad that Dixie didn't think wives should come to the office. Dave Adler and Benji (a high school teacher) ran a bookshop. Dave's brother, Don Adler, played the organ.

Hall says Fairbanks was a nice little town; it's hard to believe what's happened to it. Sixth Ave. was out of town when they moved there. There were gardens beyond them and after that, woods. Barb (John Jr.) used to love to build tree houses there.

She stayed home with her family because she didn't want her children to be with a babysitter all day. When they were older, she didn't go back to teaching because she figured she'd have to go get more schooling, as education had changed like everything else. If she had it to do again, she thinks she'd have kept on teaching.

They knew about the Line, but nobody paid any attention to it. When she was a kid in Douglas, they used to throw rocks down on the roofs of that town's Line, and the ladies would come out and give them a good what for. The kids would then run away as fast as they could.

The first Fairbanks school had just burned down when the Halls came to town. Their kids were in the first group that went to the new Main School. Mrs. Luther Hess was a regent on the board. She said the school would serve the town for years to come, but she didn't live to see how the town grew.

Hall says Hess used to plant her flowerbeds just so; it all had to be perfect. She used to pull her shades down so the carpets wouldn't fade. If Hall planted flowers, she just put them in higgledy-piggledy. Hess was one of the first teachers and was a very refined lady.

Hall is glad she'd lived her whole life in AK; she never had any desire to live Outside. She always enjoyed going to school, and teaching school. She also enjoyed being married, and her husband. She hopes he enjoyed her, too.