

## Summary for H87-82-29

Peggy Carstens is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 10/25/85

### SIDE 1

Gayle Maloy interviews Peggy Carstens in Fairbanks, AK on 10/25/85. Peggy is best known for her experiences in mining. She is being honored by the Alaskan Women in Mining as the outstanding individual who has contributed to the association. It will be 3:30 next week at the Captain Bartlett Inn, and Saturday at a banquet.

Peggy didn't grow up thinking she would be a miner. She was born in Missouri on August 8, 1904 (she just turned 81). She only lived there 3 years. She grew up in Spokane, WA and went to school in Spokane and Coeur d'Alene, ID.

They were talking about Halley's Comet the other day. Peggy saw it when she was 5, in an orphanage. The only thing she remembers is people's reaction—they thought the world was coming to an end and were very frightened.

She raised a family of five children in Spokane, and when they were grown decided she was ready for a change. She had friends who told her about all the work in AK. She arrived in Fairbanks in March 1947, when she was 43 or so, by herself; she didn't know anyone here. She had experience in cooking and dry cleaning. Maloy read an article by Jane McConkey about Peggy, who began cooking when she was very young for harvest field workers. She loved the farming life.

Peggy brought just one suitcase to AK. She came on the Golden North, a non-scheduled airplane, which didn't have seats, just benches along the sides. Someone had brought sandwiches, and another had brought gum. The airline gave them blankets, since none of the passengers were really dressed for -20.

She was taken to the old Pioneer Hotel. She discovered she couldn't get a room there, so she just sat waiting for something to happen. Trifina was the clerk then. She now has a service station by the lake, Trif's Place. She asked Peggy if she wanted a job doing maid work, and said she'd show her how to do it.

It was hard work, but Peggy says she enjoyed it. It was impossible to get a clean sheet because of the water. Trif told her to use a little kerosene in the tubs, though Peggy's not sure why. It seemed to shine them up.

Peggy showed Maloy a black and white picture during the break. It says Orvella Finch, age 5. That's Peggy's real name. She never used it, though; she chose to go by Peggy. Also in the picture are her brothers, Alfred Finch, age 3, and Buford Finch, age 7. It's the only picture of the three children saved from the covered wagon fire in Coeur d'Alene, 1913. Peggy's family was living in the covered wagon. They lost everything in the fire. In the picture, Peggy has ringlets—her hair was naturally curly.

Trif called around to find a room for Peggy. She found one at the Fairbanks Hotel, down on 4<sup>th</sup>, Peggy thinks. Then she went looking for a dry cleaning job. Muncie had a dry cleaning shop on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave., next to Piggly Wiggly at that time. So Peggy got a night job working 4 hours there, and worked as a maid during the day. She had to borrow \$20 from George Gilberson—there wasn't much money going around then, she says.

Peggy worked these jobs for part of the summer. A woman named Ophele Watmont had a dry cleaning shop in Graehl, and asked Peggy to come work for her.

Peggy lived in an apartment over Watmont's house and they shared food. In exchange for her room, Peggy cleaned and showed Watmont how to run her new machinery.

Peggy didn't like her first 2 weeks in Fairbanks. She would've gone back then if she'd had the money. But she says, thank God she never left.

Peggy went to work for Bill Herring and Ray Reedy, who opened College Cleaners dry cleaning on College Rd. in 1948. Peggy showed them how to run the shop. She also talked to Dr. Bunnell at UAF about setting up a dry cleaning and laundry service at the university. Bunnell helped her to get this business going, and to buy a house. Peggy paid him \$100/month until she paid the house off. She laid the hardwood floors; it was partially finished when she bought it. The house is gone now, but used to be located not far from the College Inn.

Peggy took some short courses in mining while at the university. Alice and Bill Herring liked to mine. Herring and Reedy had a mine up on Deadwood. That's where Peggy's enthusiasm for taking the courses came from. She says she didn't have that many friends in those days, since she was so busy making a living. Earl Beistline was her instructor in 1948 and 1949. She thinks he's one of the best.

When she was at Watmont's, they didn't have fresh milk. They used powdered "Clem Milk," that was so hard to dissolve in water, it was always lumpy. It was better than nothing, though.

The things Peggy learned in the short courses didn't help her too much in her future mining, but some did. She worked at both the university laundry and College Cleaners at this time.

Peggy brought her mother up to AK for 1 year, but she didn't like it here, and later passed away Outside. Peggy had different jobs during this time and traveled around, she says.

In 1964 Peggy applied as a cook for the Yutana Barge Line, when Art Peterson was running it. She worked there that year; it's hard work and one doesn't get much time off. The cook has to calculate how much food to buy, too. Her first stewardess in 1964 was Martha Johansen, now Martha Anders (married to Ed Anders). She had just graduated from high school.

Peggy wanted to open a drive-in restaurant at Central. She talked to Heine Cartstens. He sold her a little cabin and moved it onto some ground she had there.

Peggy's Place was a little drive-in she had on the Tok Cutoff by Chistochina. If she ran out of supplies and didn't have time to go get them, she'd give the bus a note and they'd get her supplies and bring them to her the next day. (They don't do that any more.) She was pretty much out there by herself. She stayed in a friend's big trailer.

One time a couple fellows came in late in the evening for a meal. Peggy kept a gun over the door (for protection against bears). One of the men said, "Now, what's to keep me from grabbing this gun and robbing you?" She just reached under the counter and took out a little .38 and looked at him with it, and said, "*This* will keep you from robbing me." She never saw them again. They might not have been a threat, but she had to protect herself. Whenever you're cooking, it attracts bears, she says. There used to be a lot around back then.

When Peggy met Heine Carstens, a wonderful person, she never thought she'd one day marry him. He was married at that time, but his wife died the following summer of 1964. When Peggy hurt her back in 1965, she went to the hospital, where Dr.

Hagglund was her doctor. She sent for Heine, who visited a few times. She had supplies in her truck that she was taking to Central. She was renting a cabin at Circle Hot Springs at the time (when Johnny Birdall had it).

Circle Hot Springs was the site of the courtship. Heine came in 1923 and is quite well known. He was a freighter up and down rivers and roads. He hauled 1,000 cords of wood into the mine at 66-mile. Murson Knutsen had the mine at one time.

Heine earned the title of Strongest Man in Alaska. He'd take full 55-gallon drums and physically lift them onto a freighting sled. Bill Stroecker witnessed it.

When WWII started, mining equipment was requisitioned by the government. Heine went on a barge from Circle to Whitehorse with a load of equipment. He knocked out the first bush, east of Whitehorse, on the AK Highway, with one of the Cats he brought.

## SIDE 2

Peggy and Heine married on March 17, 1966, the month she'd arrived in AK. Heine picked the 17<sup>th</sup>, since that would've been his mother's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, and it was the day he'd first landed in Alaskan waters.

They moved into his house, and spent part of the winter taking care of Circle Hot Springs and the post office. They did this in 1966 and 1967. Peggy did the cooking, and Heine ran the machinery and was supposed to take care of the bar—he didn't like that much so she did part of it, too. Peggy had a customer one night who enjoyed his meal so much, he left her a \$100 tip.

At their wedding, Heine sang her a lovely, old song: When My Hair Has Turned to Silver. After he got through, Peggy looked up, and most of the people there were crying. Maloy quotes things that Heine said about Peggy: that she's a good wife, likes people, is a good cook, is interested in his work, and likes him, too!

Peggy says they love each other very much. She misses him, but she knows he wouldn't want her to grieve, because he believed in people being happy.

The Dean of Mines at UAF was amazed that Heine discovered gold at Eagle Creek, because it wasn't a place anybody thought they should look for it. Peggy says they dug five holes with a doghouse boiler before they found the pay streak. A doghouse boiler is a machinery set-up that produces steam continually. Danny Bergevin helped them with this. Usually it was just the two of them, though Peggy's son came to visit and helped a couple years. Peggy spoke to Dan last night from Seattle. He wants any friends listening to know that he's well, a bit lonely but doing all right.

Their lower Eagle Creek streak was discovered before the road was open. They were afraid when the road opened, others would come in and stake their claims. They rode a RD-6 over 30-foot deep snowdrifts. Peggy says she was waiting to go sliding down the hill, but they were fine and went in and staked their claims.

Heine was a prospector. The romance was gone when he found the pay streaks. It wasn't the gold that excited him, it was finding it.

They moved an entire camp over Eagle Summit; Heine was past 70 and Peggy was past 60. They had bought a camp below Miller House, on Mammoth Creek. They moved all their cabins and equipment over there. Heine had old machinery from the Road Commission that they used to move it. The only thing they didn't move was their

dragline. Peggy says they were too old to really work the mine. Plus, there was a flood in August that ruined everything until the next year. Peggy talks about how they mined gold.

Peggy helped Heine at first, but later just cooked. They had panners come out and pay \$1 to pan for gold. Heine didn't live to see gold get over \$35/oz. He didn't think it would ever get that high.

They had a good time. There were so many friends that would come out. Peggy would treat them with maple bars, doughnuts, and coffee. She says she went through hardships in her first years of mining, but it was fun because she and Heine liked each other so much and were so happy doing the things they liked, and so many people came out each year, like Dr. McConkey and Dr. Teal, from Eielson.

In 1977 the AK Legislature resolved that Heine was a pioneer and a miner for 50 years, who contributed to Alaska's development by cutting railroad ties, bulldozing for the highway, etc. They honored his memory as the stuff that Alaskan folk heroes are made of, when he died. Peggy felt very honored to receive the letter from them.

After Heine passed away, Peggy was 73 and on crutches. She thought she needed something to do and a little more income, and saw a sign in the Senior Citizens place that the library on 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. needed someone. The library later moved. She worked there for 7 years, and quit last year. She was never late for work once—she doesn't believe in that.

Peggy loved working at the library. It helped her to get a hold of herself after Heine died, and not lay around. Now she goes swimming every day and does physical therapy, to "keep herself going."

Maloy says Peggy has four boyfriends. Peggy told Dr. Berger about them, when he asked her why she was in such good health. She said she got up with Will Power, went jogging with Art Ritis, went home with Charlie Horse, and went to bed with Ben Gay.

She was recently visiting in MA, and was caught in Hurricane Gloria. It was dreadful to see the big, beautiful trees being uprooted by the wind, and smashing into houses.

Peggy always preferred to cook and heat with a wood stove to anything else. One of her old faithful stoves is in Dr. McConkey's gift shop, The Forget-me-not Gift Shop on Northgate Square. She made the doctor many a pancake on it.

She's the oldest member of Alaskan Women in Mining. She says AK is one of the favorite points of all her years. She says she won't live anywhere but Fairbanks for the rest of her life if she can help it.

Maloy had a lovely tea with Peggy the other day. Peggy served her all sorts of delicious food. She also told Maloy, who was wearing high heels in the snow, to put on some snow boots.