

Person Interviewed: Lulu W. Middleton

Date: August 13, 1981

Interviewer: Kelley Miller

Place: Homer Museum

K. When did you first come to Homer?

L. We came to Homer in 1948, in August.

*moving to
1 time*
K. Why did you first decide to come to Homer?

L. Well, my husband had this dream, that he had harbored for many, many years and we just decided this was the time to come. In 1948.

K. How did you feel about coming here?

L. It just seemed the thing to do because he wanted to come so badly. It's not something I would had chosen for myself.

K. What did your husband do?

L. My husband was a draftsman. He had been educated in electrical engineering, and he had worked as a draftsman for many years. But he felt like he wanted to change and Alaska appealed to him. So we took off.

K. What did you do when you came here?

L. What did I do?

K. Yes.

*women in
homesteading*
L. (Laughter) I kept house. I had a large family. We had six children when we came. Laundry was a big production, sometimes on a board, sometimes with a gas-powered washing machine. Part of the time we had to melt snow for laundry and we had two babies in diapers. I didn't have too much time to think of what I should do, it was right there before me.

K. Did you have a homestead?

L. We filed on a homestead and the children and I lived in town in a rented house for a few months while my husband got the cabin started. On January 1st, '49 we moved out to a cabin which we rented from a neighboring settler, to be near my husband so I could cook his meals and so forth. We moved onto the homestead in March of '49.

in the woods

K. Okay, what sort of things did you raise on the homestead? Did you have a garden?

L. We always had a garden. We of course, had to clear land and plant a crop as a requirement. In those days, everybody just planted seed and reaped the hay.

K. And did you sell any of your products?

L. No, there was no market at that time. There really wasn't a market for anything.

K. What was Homer like when you first got here?

L. Well, Homer was a very small village. They were just in the process of putting in electricity. The house that we rented in town did not have electricity. So we just got used to the coleman lantern. We traded the use of our electric sewing machine, for the use of a gas motor for our washing machine with our neighbor, Mrs. Herndon, who had electricity. We lived right next to the Herndon's and they were very nice to us. That lasted for about two years until we got electricity on the homestead.

K. Oh, how did you get to HOmer?

L. We drove up on the highway, in 1948. It was a time when automobiles were unavailable, so we had to buy it on the black market. We started out in a brand new Plymouth Sedan and pulled a baggage trailer. We had quite some tough times coming over the highway, being unable to get up some hills. It took us three weeks. We were held up by washouts on the road and different things. And if you'd like to know the reason we chose Homer?

K. Yes.

L. Well, on the highway, we met Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, Gene and Lois Lawrence. They were on their way to Homer to set up a flying business; Gene was a bush pilot. He founded what is now Homer Air. We got acquainted with them and they told us about Homer, how wonderful it was. I've always been grateful to them for steering us to Homer.

K. Did you find that it was as wonderful as they said it was?

L. Yes, I liked it very much. There's no place in Alaska that I would like as much as Homer, I'm sure. We had to come down by barge because there was no road. So we loaded our car and our baggage trailer on a barge and we brought down Mr. Lawrence's car as part of our load because he had already rented a house here. He offered us the use of his house until he could get down. So we had a little house to move into until we could find a place of our own. And then in a week, we found a place that we could rent. Which was, like I said, right next to the Herndons. And we set up housekeeping. My husband and the boys would go out to the homestead and spend the good part of the week out there and maybe come back in town two or three times a week.

K. Did you build your house on the homestead?

L. Yes, my husband and our sons built a log cabin. They started working in January and it was pretty cold. They were living in a tent. And in the morning they would have an inch or so of hoar frost on the top of their blankets. They didn't have sleeping bags.

K. Just blankets?

L. They just had blankets and mattresses. They had a floor to the tent and the usual camp equipment.

K. How did they go about building the house?

L. Well they didn't even have a chainsaw then. They had a big

L. two-man saw which they used to cut down trees. We didn't peel the logs because we didn't feel we had the time. We had to have it up by March.

We had a new Ford tractor. There was no road beyond Fritz Creek and someone loaned us a winch to put on the front of the tractor. We had to winch our way up to our homestead which was two miles beyond the end of the road. So it was pretty rough. But they used the tractor to haul in the logs and proceeded to build a sixteen by twenty log cabin. My husband put a porch on it afterwards, and as soon as he could, enclosed the porch so we had a separate kitchen.

We went through everything in the way of peoneering including dipping water out of a waterhole and then for about a year, we hauled water from Fritz Creek with a tractor. We put barrels on the back and the boys would go down and fill them from the creek.

Actually, when we first moved into the cabin, we had a well and pump in the corner of the cabin. That was quite unusual at that time, so we were considered quite the plutocrats, because we had a well in our house. But it went dry in the middle of the winter, as people told us it would. But they said, "Well it'll come in again in May, when everything is thawed," but it did not come back. So,.....

K. Did you have to haul water then?

L. Well, we used the spring, but for larger quantities like for laundry and things, we hauled about two or three barrels at a time from the creek. And then in '51, we dug another well outside. We put a barrel up in the loft of the kitchen. We'd use a hand pump to force the water ~~to our sink in the kitchen~~ up into the barrel and we'd ~~use a hand pump~~ have running cold water to our sink in the kitchen. We had a hose by which we would fill the reservoir in the end of our cook stove. I think we had about a twenty gallon reservoir that was pretty handy, we had hot water to dip out of the reservoir.

K. Yeah, it sounds like it. You didn't have electricity yet at that time?

L. We got electricity in September of 1950. And we moved on there in March of '49, so we were about a year and a half without electricity.

K. Did you mostly stay on the homestead during the winter?

L. Yes, we stayed on the homestead ~~during the winter?~~ year round. In the spring, my husband would go out and work in construction as ~~an~~ ~~electrician~~. And I was there with the children. My husband would get the garden planted before he left and then the children knew how to take care of it.

K. Did you have to go to town to get supplies very often?

L. We had to go to town, yes about once a month. We used the tractor to go down to Fritz Creek, and get in our car to come into town.

L. And by the way, they told us when we came in that that was the first new car that had ever come to Homer. We were fresh from the East coast and we were kind of greenhorns, and they thought, "uh-oh, here come the pilgrims," they called us pilgrims. And, "well, when they leave, we'll go to their sale", because alot of people did leave. They would take bets on howlong we would stay and so forth. They dubbed us the "limousine homesteaders."

K. How did you stroe your food for the winter?

L. ~~Did~~Well, we canned our meat and fish and we made saurcraut. We canned, rhubarb and I think that all I did in the way of canning. We made alot of jams and jellies. We put cranberries down in jars. But ~~the~~ first year or two we didn't really have all that many ~~ur~~plus things to save for winter. The garden didn't produce all that much. We had a root cellar, of course, for our potatoes and carrots and cabbage.

K. Did you ever have any really ~~hard~~ winters that would make you want to go back to where you came from?

L. ~~Well~~-weno. Actually we didn't find the cold all that great a hardship. We had a coal and wood stove and our cabin was pretty cozy. We rather enjoyed the winters, it was so beautiful out there with the snow on the trees. No, I can't say that we ever wanted to go vecause of the cold.

K. What did you do during the winter on the homestead?

L. Wel, we had the children on correspondence courses and that took a good many hours a day. Plus which, the chores alone, cooking and ~~b~~aking and we had to do our own haircuts and that sort of thing. We were just really busy, we would play checkers and chess and twenty questions and card games. We had a radio, but we didn't have too much social life. We had small children which kind of ~~kepp~~ us entertained (laughter).

K. Yeah, I bet. What kind of chores did they have on the homeaww-
stead?

L. Well the usual ~~h~~opping woo, emptying ashes, hauling in water, or pumping water up into the tank and filling the lanterns and that sort of thing.

K. ~~D~~id you make very many trips to Anchoage?

L. No. It was several years before we got to Anchorage. The road wasn't put through until 1950. My husband went to Anchorage, he ~~w~~ould fly on business trips or to and from his jobs. But I can't remember, actually when I had my first trip to anchorage.

K. What was the community of Homer like?

L. Oh, you mean the twon itself?

K. Yes.

L. Well, there weren't very many modern houses, the Sam Pratt house was about the most modern residence, then I think. They had the little store then, and Sam Pratt was one of the first people that we got acquainted with. He was very helpful with suggestions and pointing out different pitfalls that we should avoid and all that sort of thing. And Howard Myhill and Berle were very helpful and I mentioned the Herndons. I remember Berle Myhill brought us a big bowl of strawberries, when we first came to town.

We did go to church, we went to the Church of Christ. We would come down to the creek on the tractor every Sunday and get in the car and drive into town. And course, that contributed alot toward our social life, just getting to church nnce a week.

K. How many churches were there?

L. Let's see. There was the Church of Christ, and the Community Church. The Catholic people had a visiting priest that came in and held services. But as for organized churches in existence then, there just the two that I remember.

K. You mentioned that your kids took correspondance. Did they ever go to a school in Homer?

L. Yes, they started school in 1954. We had them on correspondance courses until 1954 that was when the road was completed to the point where they could send the bus out.

K. And what was the school system like?

L. When we first came the enrollment was about 100 - new buildings were added as the population increased.

K. Did their supplies come in by boat or how did they get the supplies?

L. Yes, they had freighters that came in.

K. Were there planes that also brought supplies in very often?

L. You could have them brought in by plane, yes.

K. Yeah, how did you get yo r supplies while building your house, like the windows?

L. There was a shipping strike on at that time and we couldn't get windows when we first built out house, we got the heavy plastic to put on the windows and it was a year before we really got glass windows in.

K. Oh, so it took a while for all the supplies to come in?

L. Well, we got the nails and things like that. We used the logs for our building and there was a small saw mill operating where we bought our sawed lumber for the, the roof and the floor.

K. Yes. How dñ you feel that Homer has changed since you've gotten here?

L. Oh, well it's just grown in leaps and bounds. Now, it's nothing like it was then. We have all these new buildings. We didn't even have a bank when we came.

K. What did you use then?

L. We banked in Anchorage.

K. Did you have to up there very often?

L. Well not too often. It was just a little town then; the big influx of settlers hadn't started. We were kind of in the forefront of that settling movement. The next year, several people came in and settled on East Hill Road. But in '48 the prevailing attitude was, "what are they doing here, why did they come", and, "they won't last long" and that sort of thing. I would say that new settlers weren't particularly welcome at that time.

K. They didn't help our newcomers?

L. Some people did. Yes some, as I already mentioned, were very gracious and very helpful. But by and large, the ~~few~~ feeling was, "why don't people buy land in town", what do you want to go out there in the woods for"? That was the public feeling at that time.

K. How do you feel about the changes that have occurred in Homer?

L. Well, I think that the changes were just bound to happen, they were ~~inevitable~~. And even now, there are some people that don't like all this subdividing and I'm one of them, I really wish it would just stay like it is. But you can't come in and close the gate behind you. People are going to come for the same reason you were attracted here in the first place. I'm afraid that in another five or ten years, it'll be all urban, and it'll lose its flavor altogether.

K. Did your family change because you moved here?

L. Well, we all changed. I didn't have to iron so many broad-clothed shirts a week and all that sort of thing. Mode of dress was entirely different. We had to go to shoe packs and long johns and flannel shirts and that sort of thing was a complete turn-around from where we had lived back east.

K. What is it that you liked most about living on the homestead?

enjoy homesteading
L. What do I like most about living on the homestead. Well, everything was new, it was just a complete turnaroung in our lifestyle. It was so beautiful, really beautiful. We were just starting a whole new life. And I think the challenge was the biggest thing.

K. So if you could do it all over again, would you come back to Homer?

L. Yes, I would definitely do it all over again. I've always like people, but the way we lived back east, we were more or less provincial. Here we're acquainted with all kinds of people and I love that. My horizons have widened, The family has benefited from the pioneering experience - they learned a variety of skills which come in handy and they have a host of happy memories to draw upon.