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ORAL HISTORY
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I, ELIZABETH F. ELSNER, MD, of
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Elizabeth F. Elsner, M.D.
signature

4/16/91
date

ORAL HISTORY BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

NAME: ELIZABETH F. ELSNER
 (first) (middle) (last)

(NICKNAME:) BETTY (MAIDEN NAME:) FULLER

MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. BOX 207, ESTER, AK 99725
 (city/state/zip)

DATE OF BIRTH: 04/06/23 ^{June} BIRTHPLACE WALTHAM, MASS.
 (city/state)

SPOUSE: ROBERT ELSNER

MARRIAGE DATE: 12/28/46 PLACE: FALL RIVER, MASS.

CHILDREN: WENDY, PETER, STEVEN

ALASKAN RESIDENCY: 1953-56, '73 - present

OCCUPATION/PROFESSION: PHYSICIAN

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECT IN RELATION TO ORAL HISTORY:

INTERVIEWER: Margaret Van Cleve

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 4/10/91 TAPE NUMBER: 314

Dr. Elizabeth Elsner

When Dr. Elizabeth Elsner came to Fairbanks in 1953, there were only 12 doctors there. One male physician told her that Alaska was "no place for a woman doctor."

Being a pediatrician, Dr. Elsner worked in partnership with Dr. Ribar whose practice was predominantly obstetrics in those days. Whenever Dr. Ribar was out of town, Dr. Elsner stepped in to cover his practice, delivering several babies including one born in the front seat of Dr. Elsner's jeep.

Dr. Elsner organized the first well baby clinics in Fairbanks. One clinic was held once a month in the College Presbyterian Church and another was held twice a month in the George E. Thompson Memorial Library (now North Country Federal Credit Union Building).

Covering the northern part of the territory, Dr. Elsner travel extensively in the bush, setting up clinics in such places such as Stevens Village, Beaver, Fort Yukon, and Anaktuvak Pass. Diseases such as T.B., measles, and chronic ear infections among children were commonplace during the fifties.

In the tape Dr. Elsner talks about the traditional life of the Eskimos of Anaktuvak Pass in 1955. They lived in sod huts in the winter and tents in the summer, leading a semi-nomadic life in pursuit of game.

Dr. Elsner and her family left Alaska for several years, returning in 1973 when her husband Bob joined the staff at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks as a professor of marine science. When the Elsners visited Anaktuvak Pass the,

they noticed several changes in the span of one generation. Villagers lived in frame ASHA homes. Children attended local schools instead of being sent to Mt. Edgecumbe in Sitka or to Wrangel.

And as for the role of women physicians in Alaska, Dr. Elsner said that the first female doctor arrived in the territory in 1896 with others following along in areas such as Tanana and Bethel. Those women and Dr. Elsner have proven that Alaska is a place for women physicians after all.