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Narrator: Bob Bloom

Interviewer: William Cashen

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Series: William Cashen Collection

Interviewer [not identified until the very end: William Cashen] introduces Bob Bloom, who served in the first board of trustees at the Alaska College [Alaska Agricultural College & School of Mines, now the University of Alaska Fairbanks].

Bob discusses how he came to Alaska: He traveled across the Chilkoot Pass and on to Dawson in 1898 where he stayed until gold was discovered in the Tanana Valley by Felix Pedro. Pedro came from the Circle country to prospect in [Tanana Valley] area, and found [gold from] Goldstream Creek.

Barnette came up the Tanana [River] until he got to the [original] site of the Catholic Church [Immaculate Conception Church] and couldn't continue any further, so he overwintered there near the corner of the NC Company building. One morning the [Jap, properly Jujiro Wada] who was staying with him discovered smoke [from Pedro's fire] rising from Goldstream area. "That's how they communicated with each other."

While Bob was in Dawson he had a store where he sold hardware and [sounds like gent's furnishings]. He never sold groceries; his store was "a miner's store" where he sold clothing and so forth. He heard the news from Fairbanks gold strike while he was talking with a friend of his. The Jap [Jujiro Wada] came over and told that gold had been discovered from Tanana Valley. "That's all there was to it. I hitched up my dog team and I ran down." It took 8 days for him to travel in the spring. He didn't use the rivers for transportation, but ran on snow covered trails.

Bob arrived to the site where Fairbanks currently is in 1904. Bob looked around and saw very good potential to open a business so he staked a location. By that time Judge Wickersham was there already and had a Court House. Bob mentions briefly the owners of the Alaska Steamship Company who were bunch of Scotch men. Wickersham didn't please the Alaska Steamship Company owners [for some unspecified reason] and they "fought him to a fare-thee-well". [Difficult to make out]].

Bob's store was located a bit lower than where the post office is now on 2nd Avenue. Then some business people from Dawson came down: Lavery, Andrew Nerland, Martin Pinske [Pinska?] and his

partner. The bunch of them established the town of Fairbanks. Bob Bloom was one of the earliest settlers and he is one of the Pioneer of Alaska chapter members that are still alive.

Bob is asked about Judge Wickersham. He tells a story about the first case Wickersham had while he was in Valdez. At that time the [Tanana Valley] discovery was made and two factions were organized: There was "this outfit that Bunnell represented" and there were the real prospectors who went to McGrath and staked claims there. Bunnell's group wanted to get a hold of it [claims at McGrath?] and Wickersham decided against it. They fought all the way until they bought all Bob's steelings [?,not clear what this is] and got the majority to open up the college.

Interviewer recaps the story so it is clearer: 1915 Judge Wickersham was in Washington and got a bill passed to establish an agricultural college, and he selected the place. He chose the place because it was right next to the [Agricultural] Experiment Station. Bob tells it wasn't so. The place was chosen when Wickersham saw the view to Mount McKinley on a clear day, and as soon as he saw it, he said "this is the place we want to establish the college on."

Bob mentions Luther Hess and his wife who made a big donation to the college. Bob was with them at a party [or the party] the day that came out [?,not clear what this means]. There was Jack Buckley, one of the boys who had a store in town, Wickersham, and a couple of fellows who went to the Mount McKinley. They [who?] were against it. They didn't want a college here because it was too far out of town, nobody would come here to attend college, and there was a group that wanted the college to be built downtown. That was one of the reasons fighting started. NC Company was mixed up in it as well as the Alaska Steamship Company. Interviewer expresses the opinion that the Alaska Steamship Company wanted to keep control of Alaska's trade and commerce. [Break in a recording.]

Bob wants to talk more about the fight between Wickersham and Bunnell. They [unclear who] brought in Shackelford to challenge Wickersham in a debate. Debate was held and Wickersham "made mush" out of Shackelford who never got up and said a word. Wickersham was a wonderful man and he was a great friend of Alaska.

[This section is not clear. Bob appears to be talking about a legal case that Wickersham was involved in. They try to hide it [Wickersham's greatness?]. Bob is saying that Alaska Steamship Company never belonged to Alaska [unclear]. It was all political, and they wanted to joke around that Seattle people had a right to it. And when he had the case, he gave the right to Seattle people. Stephen Birch was [unclear].

Stephen Birch wanted to have the right to see from the Seattle bond [unclear]. That's the McGrath fund. There were also earlier gold found from Circle. That was in McGrath.

Not clear if Stephen Birch was a business agent or a lawyer, but he "was a pain in the neck". There was a reason why Wickersham was appointed to be a judge by Theodore Roosevelt. He came into the country from Tacoma, established everything legally and conscientiously and he meant to make Alaska part of the United States.

Interviewer is talking about Wickersham's career in Congress: He got elected to the Congress in 1908 and he served until around 1920 or 1921. Then Dan Sutherland was the Territorial Delegate to Congress for about 10 years. In 1931-32, Wickersham was Delegate for one more term before he retired.

Bob was on the first board of trustees after the Territorial Legislature of 1917 accepted a land grant from the federal government and the governor appointed a board of trustees. Bob says he wasn't on the first board that Snodgrass was in. Interviewer lists the board members from 1922: P.J. [Paul John] Rickert, Mrs. [Harriet Belle] Luther Hess, Robert Bloom, Robert Lavery, J.A. [John] McIntosh, A.J. [Anton Johann] Nordale, M. D. [Milton] Snodgrass, and Morton E. Stevens.

According to Bob, Stevens changed. He was a lawyer in town, but also a drunk. Stevens turned his back on his friends and went over to Bunnell's side, but Bob doesn't want to talk about it more. Bob says that he has evidence that Bunnell did Stevens some kind of favor, but doesn't know what that favor was.

Bob, Lavery, Andrew Nerland and McIntosh realized that they can't move around with their families from pillar to post, and wanted to give them an education. Washington, D.C. helped them by donating \$50,000 dollars; it was a land grant college. The ones that were opposing their plans said that it's too early and that there is no business jobs, "but we never listened, we went ahead with it". Bob's group represented the main population of Fairbanks.

Discussing building the campus, which was started in 1917, and a delay which was due to legislature ceasing to fund them in 1919: Bob Bloom and a few more loaned the college some cash to pay the teachers. "It took long, but they paid us back." Interviewer notes that this must have happened only after opening the college which happened in 1922.

Bob says that delay in the opening of the College occurred at the same time with the earthquake, from which Snodgrass and his family had to flee. At that time they were \$50, 000 dollars ahead but they had to guarantee it. After Bunnell was nominated, they couldn't [couldn't budge Bunnell as the side that favored him] had the majority, they [the university] needed some money on credit. Bob took Bunnell out to the NC-Company and [Volney] Richmond, who was president at the time, told he wouldn't take Bunnell's word but he would take Bob Bloom's, and so with Bob guaranteeing the loan, they acquired the \$50,000 dollars to finish construction.

Snodgrass was in charge of the Agricultural Experiment Station and a potential president for the university. He came over [to Fairbanks area] after the Katmai earthquake and was on the board of trustees. They accused him of wanting to become the president, but he never did. Mrs. Snodgrass is still alive and can tell about that. Snodgrass was a straight-forward Alaskan who worked all he could but it didn't help him and he was [politically] pushed out [of college board]. He went to work for the railroad, and later established Matanuska.

Discussing the candidates for presidency. Bob tells how Wickersham helped them to get together. They were a businessmen, not politicians, and they wanted to establish Fairbanks as a business community, despite not having very much money. Wickersham helped them in gathering money to open up the college. A few people were totally against it, but finally Wickersham managed to gather up enough

official funds for a majority. They had four: Stevens, Lavery, McIntosh, Bob himself. Stevens turned back on them [?]. And Snodgrass. [unclear]

Bob thinks that any of the four would have made a better president than Bunnell was. "There was nothing on the little two-faced school teacher for Indians. He [Bunnell] didn't have even a white man's college"[presumably a college education]. [Bloom's point seems to be that Bunnell didn't have the educational background or experience to be a college president.] According to Bob, Bunnell learned everything he knew in his office, while the interviewer on his part claims that Bunnell was a brilliant. Bob maintains that he was more of a politician than he was an educator. Bunnell was lucky in that he hired well intending teachers who really wanted to see Alaska established. They [the teachers at the college] worked in hardship conditions. There were particularly two who worked with their families on the river in order to get an extra chance for a higher education. Bob himself never went to college, but his children did. He has two doctors in a family and the other two are teachers.] Bill Stroecker [unclear] and Bob's daughter, Meta Bloom [Buttnick], taught here in school.

Other applicant for presidency, besides Bunnell, was a well-qualified old gentleman, whose name Bob can't recall, but he was pushed aside. Talking about if Wickersham ever wanted to become the college president: Bob thinks Wickersham might have been interested, and continues to say that Wickersham would probably have given it everything that he had. His wife also was fine teacher.

Wickersham was still a delegate to the congress but he could have been spared the time and would have been devoted to the cause. Bob thinks that if it wasn't for him, Alaska wouldn't have anything. He was instrumental for the development of the College, but never asked for the presidency, because Bunnell wouldn't have given to him even if Bunnell could have given it. [unclear].

Question about the feud between Wickersham and Bunnell. According to interviewee, they ran against each other as delegates in 1914. [Tape seems to have been paused for a moment.] During that time Bob walked into the NC-Company and the NC-Company was against [who? Wickersham?] because people were against him. Bob tells how [name unclear] said to him that the NC-Company had mortgages [?] on every merchant they had [and put political pressure on those people not to support Wickersham]. When Wickersham came to town to go home—his house was at the corner of Noble Street--people were standing behind the door and afraid to shake hands with him.

He [Wickersham] had a few fighters for him too. That group to which Bob belonged to consisted of "the main people" who "knew everything." On the Election Day, Bob went to the NC-Company store and Joe who was the NC-Company electrical man asked if Bob wants to place bets on the winner of the election.. Bob told he wasn't a betting man and that he had no money, but nevertheless he drew \$1,200 dollars from his pocket to table and told he is going to bet that Wickersham carries Fairbanks. Richmond came up and asked if Bob knew what he was talking about.]. \$,1200 dollars was all the money Bob had, and he was going to pay his bills. Richmond told Bob he was foolish to bet all that to which Bob said he wasn't foolish and Wickerham carried Fairbanks.

Discussing how Bob served on the board of trustees until 1925, and how there were many problems in getting the place started [recording halts for 15s]. Anecdotes about Bob Lavery: He was a strong-minded

man. Palmer who he was working for [unclear] wouldn't talk to him because he [Lavery?] would talk a lot to Mrs. Lavery. Lavery wouldn't drink, which was also a proof of his strong character.

Bob knew the entire early faculty. They hardly got paid, but they devoted their hearts and souls to get their kids "so they could hold their own against the other." Mentioned: Earl Pilgrim, Ernest Patty, Archie Truesdell whose son is in the News-Miner now, Herbert Bruce, and Elisabeth Kirkpatrick. Bob mentions a fellow named Roth who thought that no one would want to go to the college.

Bob tells that the people of Fairbanks and Anchorage, McGrath, and all the old timers who came here came from Dawson, "were Alaskans by desire." They stayed in the country and built it up.

[Somebody enters, exchanging pleasantries with Bob. Talking about Bob's children who got educated at the University of Washington.]

[Bob is looking for some letter.] Bob never ran for political office since he didn't want to. He wanted to see the town built, and the education system too.

He operated his store for 40 years, after which Hajdukovich bought it in 1942. The store didn't move and was still in its original place at the time of the interview [1970]. Every move is imprinted in Bob's head because he worked hard to establish it.

Mrs. Keyes is mentioned.

Bob shows the interviewer his membership certificate in the AYP [Alaska-Yukon Pioneers] organization. It took 40 years to recognize that Bob was the one who opened the college. [They are probably looking at some item.]

Now he is the last living member of the original board of trustees. Discussing interviewer's book that is under writing process. Anything Bob has told, he is willing to stand behind. He doesn't hold grudges against Bunnell. Bunnell had a fight and he was helped by the Alaska Steamship Company and they ruled the country and they are ruling it.

University has turned out better than Bob hoped. Bob's children had a good start in Alaska and were able to go outside for higher education.

Bob was always interested in agriculture: Everybody told him he wouldn't be able to raise wheat, but they sowed some wheat and found out that they got better kernels than the Outside wheat did. Bob gathered it up[wheat seed apparently] for years, until he had enough to seed 50 acres, and he got 120 sacks [of wheat] out of it. Everyone that he gave that wheat to in order to reproduce the next year gave it to hens or pigs.

Bob also lost \$1,000 dollars that he invested in the Fairbanks flour mill that didn't stay in business. The [owner, Barrett] killed himself. Hosea Ross [apparently another owner] "didn't care a button for the country".]. By that time Bob had was fed up with the operation. He had the finest crop of wheat ever. Bob's farm was where Yankovich Road is now. It was operating around 1940s.

Talking about Wickites [supporters of Wickersham apparently], and whether Wickersham ran independent from the Republican Party. According to Bob, he did that because he couldn't get a nomination. He got elected despite of it looking like he would be beaten. He was able to maintain the [unclear] of Fairbanks. He was a great man who devoted all his time, energy, and ability to help Alaska. The newspapers were against him because that company didn't want him [unclear].

Looking at a card. [unclear] head of the alumnae, discussing the picture[?].

Bob spends winters in Seattle, but he still has a home in Fairbanks and a piece of property near Bob Meyers' [sp?] place. About Bob's health and age: He is now 92 years old.

Bob met [Austin E. "Cap"] Lathrop the first time when he came in and bought out that fellow Whiting [sp?] who had a possession of the theatre, and Lathrop was in theatre business. He was on the board of the college after Bob left.

About Bob's honorary alumni status: As long as Bunnell was alive, he wouldn't get it.

Closing the interview. Bob wants to add that the achievement of the Alaska University doesn't go all the way to Bunnell because the faculty had a lot to do with bringing it to the place it was now [in the 1970s]

Mention of Earl Pilgrim who did a lot for Alaska but isn't nearly as renowned as his partner. He was a devoted miner.

End of the interview.