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Narrator: Edby Davis

Interviewer: William Cashen

Date: 10/7/70

Place: UAF Museum, Fairbanks, Alaska

Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen

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Notes: Originals on cassette tapes. Master copies on CD.

Series: William Cashen Collection

Interviewer [probably William Cashen] introduces Edby as one of the true old-timers of Alaska. Edby was born in Seattle 10/18/1894. Edby is 76 years old at the time of the interview. According to Edby, there was a panic all over United States at the time he was born, and when gold was found from Klondike in 1896 at least 100,000 people started heading that way. All didn't reach Dawson but scattered along the way.

There was the Dyea trail, and the Edmonton trail near Cordova, but the best of all was the way of St. Michael's [up the Yukon River] and up to Dawson or Whitehorse. But on account of that panic, Edby's father "took a strike" in 1899 and Edby's mother and himself followed into Dawson that fall. They landed on the steamer Willie Erwin and when it returned to Whitehorse, a big chunk of ice got underneath it and it capsized.

Edby's brother was born in Dawson in 1901 and in 1906 they had a fire in Fairbanks. The business was waning in Dawson so Pa came to Fairbanks in spring 1906. Edby and his mother followed him in in the fall.

Edby graduated from Fairbanks high school in 1917 – there were four of them. First person graduated from there [the high school] in 1913 and one year there were only 2 graduates. Edby recognizes the need to start talking about the University of Alaska's history.

The University was built in the summer of 1917 and the first building was on a concrete foundation. Edby helped in doing the electric wiring in Dr. Bunnell's home which now has been moved.

In days of Territory [when Alaska was a territory], they had marshal's office and judiciary system as well as a post office. When politicians changed in Washington, D.C., "everybody was dismissed from janitor on up." [In Territorial days, Alaska was administered by the federal government and positions such as governor and judge were by political patronage].

In 1911, there was a Democrat Convention in Cordova and they elected Bunnell to run against Wickersham who was a Republican. Bunnell was in Valdez at the time. [Break in the recording.] He ran [for delegate] and ordinarily he was defeated, but at the same time Woodrow Wilson was elected for President and "to put oil on troubled waters," they appointed Bunnell the judgeship of the Fourth Judicial Division.

Bunnell came to Fairbanks and Edby remembers him when he was stumping. He was talking about his years in school, and his career: teaching, practicing law during his summer vacation. He came to Fairbanks and stayed at the Nordale Hotel – all Democrats did, and it was "a hot bed for Democrats." He got the judgeship in 1915 and then he served until President Harding got to power and dismissed all of them, putting Republicans on positions "from janitor on up."

At that time the Alaska Agricultural College had been dormant. Sometimes buildings had a janitor, sometimes not. But they [trustees] got together to open it [the College] in 1922. Mr. Rickert (sp?) wanted to appoint Snodgrass, a farmer, to be the President [of the College], but Mr. Stevens [Morton E. Stevens?] who was a lawyer, quoted a law that said that they couldn't appoint one of the trustees. That's how Bunnell got the job.

The school opened in 1922 and they were short of funds. All big boxes were used for desks and small boxes were used for chairs.

Interviewer wants to know more about Edby's brother, Roden, who was the first student to "sign the book out here" [sign up to be a student]. Edby and Roden had some tension since Roden was upforth and dramatically inclined, and Edby stammered and stayed behind the scenes. "Rody this and Rody that." He [Roden] graduated from the Fairbanks High School in 1920, there were 8 of them, and the college opened in 1922 and Roden was the first to register.

At that time there was only a wagon road to the University and most of the people who came there, came by the train. They had a special car. Miss Berail (Berylle? Beryl? Berell? sp?) was Dr. Bunnell's secretary and on the day of opening of the school Miss Berail and Roden they walked the railroad ties so that they could be early at the University.

There was one story building there, with a boiler and a steam plant underneath where Mr. Sullivan operated it. He had living quarters for him and his wife, and they burned coal. It was a 50-horsepower boiler. They had an auxiliary plant that they wanted to run but they had some trouble with it and they asked Edby to go and look it over. There was a short in the armature and that was it.

School opened and they had boxes for furniture.

Bunnell was a hard-working man and like Morton and Stephens [who are they?] say, he came here [to Alaska] as a poor lawyer, but Edby thinks that he worked hard and when he resigned, he was a good lawyer. He was a fiend for work.

First graduation was on 1923. John Shanly had spent 3 years at the Cornell University, and then he spent 4 years at the College.

The first year Dr. Bunnell lived in his home on 8th and Lacey. It's still there. His daughter was about 6 or 8 years old and was in a room with Mrs. Kappor [Kepper? sp?]. For the first year, Bunnell lived in his home, sometimes taking the car, but oftentimes walking [to the College]. Oftentimes when Edby was going to work at 6am, he would see Bunnell and other faculty members walking towards the University. "They had it hard, but they all had a 100-percent spirit."

Interviewer lists members of the regents and the faculty: Bunnell, Clinton Morgan, Elisabeth Kirkpatrick, Herbert Bruce, Archie Truesdell, Ernest Patty and Earl Pilgrim. Edby knew Mr. Morgan. He was a farmer who built a log house down on the flat here [Probably the land at the foot of College Hill]. It's now occupied by Mr. Hubert who is an instructor at the Lathrop High School. Elisabeth Kirkpatrick was there for a year and left then to marry a man, got sick and she died around Los Angeles. In 1929, Edby's father and brother went to Los Angeles to look her up, but they couldn't find her.

Mr. Bruce was a forward man. He was sharp and blunt. He told Rodin that a student like him wouldn't be allowed on campus in the States. Rodin went to school only for one year.

Talking about Rodin's working life. Edby "got tired of playing Sunday school boy" and decided to go to an electrician school in Washington D.C. and Roden took his job at the NC power-plant. Rodin has followed power plant engineering [field] and he stayed with the NC-Company until around 1926 when the Fairbanks Exploration Company started and sent for him. He was a ship engineer until around 1930-1940 when he was sent to Ladd Field [now: Fort Wainwright] as an engineer. In February 1951, he dropped dead on a job. Had he lived six weeks older, he would have been 50-years-old. He was married, and had 3 children who are all in Jacksonville, Florida. Roden was an active, good boy. He had a Masonic funeral. If he had lived, he would have 8 grandchildren at the time of the interview.

In Edby's opinion the University alumnae should buy Bunnell's home in the corner of 8th Street and Lacey Street and make it into a memorial. He started living there in 1914. He didn't build the house.

Once Edby went there as a meter-man for the NC to see the electric meter. At that time, meters were inside the houses. When people found out how much the bill was, 30 cents a kilowatt and a dollar rent for the meter, Edby often "was lucky to get out of the house alive". Discussing high energy costs. Everything was wood then, and firewood was \$8 for cord.

Coal was introduced in 1922. The first janitor they [the College] had was Mr. Stergio [sp?]. Several times Mr. Stergio was busy with something else and Mr. Bunnell would sweep the whole building. "He was a worker from way back."

Discussing whether Bunnell was liked as a judge. In 1915, when Edby was 21 years old and wasn't following [politics], but it was said at the time, that all of Mr. Bunnell's decisions which were taken to the court of appeals were reversed. Edby says he doesn't know much about law.

Those days there were floating courts. The whole court would get on a boat that would float the river to to Flat and to Iditarod. That happened in summer time.

They had 5 months for river transportation and 7 months of winter. In winter, there was no water transportation. People [passengers] would generally leave on first boat and come back in the early fall. The last boat would leave here [Fairbanks] on 1st of October to go to Whitehorse, and sometimes they left later, but it was risky.

Bunnell had joined the Masonic Lodge in Valdez. Edby is a Mason as well. Bunnell would attend a lodge every once in a while, when the grand master came to town, and he was always asked to talk when they had a banquet. Bunnell had a "magnetic way of talking. He had a way of keeping you spell bound and getting across what he said." He was a very good talker and a good man to talk to, and he wasn't wishy-washy.

Comparing Wickersham and Bunnell's speaking abilities: Bunnell was more suave while Wickersham was blunt. Wickersham was old-school and "would call an ace an ace, and spade a spade whereas Bunnell was more suave," or rather, more civilized. Bunnell had a university diploma, and Edby believes that Wickersham never went beyond 8th grade but he studied law. Then it was different than it's now. Warren Taylor got out of the army. He worked as a fireman at the Copper River Railroad and at nights he studied law, and he is still one of the leading lawyers in town.

Interviewer is talking about bad blood between Wickersham and Bunnell who were on opposite sides of political thinking. Senate has to confirm appointments [for judgeship, for example], and Bunnell served one four-year term and when he was up for re-nomination, Wickersham raised charges against him. Bunnell was never confirmed. He served for 3 years by recess appointments during the last three years of his judgeship. He was accused of political activity by Wickersham, but it was never substantiated. [Pause in the recording.]

Wickersham came in [the fall] to promote himself against Bunnell, saying the Bunnell was a good Democrat because he was once a Republican. Wickersham claimed that Bunnell just changed his politics, which Edby doesn't find to be true, because he had some good ground with the Republican Party. Bunnell tried to answer that, but it was hard. As the interviewer notes, Wickersham too switched parties: first he was a Progressive, then Independent, then a Democrat. Bunnell belonged to the AB-Lodge [interviewee doesn't explain what that was, probably Arctic Brotherhood Lodge].

Mentioned the first bulletin. Discussing some other items. Ernest Patty was a graduate of the University of Washington and came here after WW1, just like Earl Pilgrim. Pilgrim had a commission in the army and was there as an instructor. [Break in the interview, taking photos for approximately 3m 48s.]

Did interviewer ever learn how Eva McGown came to Fairbanks. [Break in the recording.]

[Fragmentary pieces of conversation.]

[Interview with Frank P. Young starts from 31:25]

Interviewer: William Cashen

Date: 9/16/1970

Place: UAF Museum, Fairbanks, AK.

Summary created by: Varpu M Lotvonen

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Introducing the interview with special focus on years from 1914 till 1921 when Bunnell was the judge.

Frank was born in Seattle, Washington. He was 3-years old when he came to Juneau in 1896. His family stayed there for two years. He knows only the stories his father used to tell about the early days.

Frank's father talked about Joe Juneau and Harris [no first name given], the founders of Juneau. .

Frank's father was in the restaurant business and they left Juneau in 1898 and went to Skagway and stayed there until 1899 when they started building a railroad. Frank's father was working in a restaurant there.

Discussing how Frank's family got to the Interior Alaska: They went over the Chilkoot Pass in in spring of 1899. They did the trip like the rest of the stampeders, Frank's mother was only 20 years old and already had Frank and his sister. Another sister had been born in Skagway. They didn't have to walk all the way because Frank's father had a boat that they [unclear who he is talking about exactly] made in Lake Bennett. They crossed several lakes and got into the Yukon River, and then to Dawson City. They stayed in Dawson until 1904 when Frank was 12-years-old and could already remember things fairly well.

Frank is talking about what happened when the news about the Fairbanks discovery reached them: They [the Young family] came to Fairbanks in fall. Frank's father had already been to Fairbanks in 1904, and he came back to get the rest of the family who moved to Fairbanks in 1905.

Frank's father opened a restaurant with Harry Bentley [and it was called] Bentley and Young. Frank's father's name was Frank too, Frank A. Their restaurant was located just down on 1st Avenue, right across the street from the USO [United Service Organization, a nonprofit organization that serves military members and their families]. That was in 1905.

Discussing the big fire of 1906: Frank saw one of the river boats, the Lobby Talbot, burn up on the river and sink on the day of the fire.

Cashen tells a story about NC-Company, who were trying to keep up the water pressure [by burning wood that produced steam] and found bacon from the storehouse and thought, "by golly, we gotta keep up the steam pressure in the boilers," and threw the bacon and ham on top of the half-green wood that they had to burn to build steam. The whole town was burning.

Frank went to the first school in Fairbanks. Old-timer Charley Quammer [sp? Creamer] mentioned. That first school started in 1905 and only had a dozen pupils. Interviewer notes that it wasn't a town of families, but of stampedeers.

Frank's father built a house in 1905. Original building was in the same lot [where Frank's house is now]. It flooded and they had to build all over again, so the old original part is gone, but the location is still the same. Their family has had the same lot for 65 years.

When Frank first started school, there was no high school. It was established three years later. He graduated from Fairbanks High School in 1910. It was the first or the second class to graduate. Frank lost his diploma in a hotel fire and when he went to get his records from the old Fairbanks Public school, they had burned up when the old school burned up..

There was Leroy Moyer, Johnny Parsons, whose father was a Presbyterian minister, a couple of Crammer [sp? Creamer] girls. In Frank's opinion, there is no comparison between how they teach now, and how they did then.

Talking about Frank's work life: Frank got into mining. First he worked down in a hole [drift mine?], which was hard work. He earned 5 dollars a shift and the shift were 10 hours long at the time. Then he was tending buckets [on a dredge?] and bought another shaft. He worked for a couple of seasons and it was pretty hard work. Those days one had to do hard work, sometimes regardless of what education they had.

Then Frank mined for himself at Bald Creek [Balt?] and on lower Goldstream [Creek]. They had 3-4 partners. Frank was once in a deal where there was a young woman as a partner, as a cook. Frank was a little dubious about having a woman as a partner, but she cooked for them and eventually got into the partnership. They had a good ground at the time. But they were all young men and it didn't work out too well.

Frank went in the hole [debt] with the NC-Company [who grubstaked him] for quite a few thousand dollars, and it took him years [to pay back]. His first claim had bad ground. It was too deep and wet and the bedrock swelled, snapping timbers "like tooth picks". They were in the hole with the NC-Company for about \$8,000 or \$9,000 dollars, and had to eventually close down, but Frank says he paid back every penny of it. Then he made a few thousand dollars in Goldstream [Creek].

Interviewer explains grubstaking: NC-Company was the biggest grubstaker. You went there, told about your ground and if they knew you, they would grubstake you for food and tools. Frank doesn't recall them gathering interest. Frank thinks the price of things wasn't bad at the time, and the dollar was still valuable.

Interviewer explains Wickersham's political career. Wickersham practiced law in Alaska and resigned from his judgeship in 1907 to run for a delegate. First delegates to Congress [were chosen?] in 1906. [First delegates from Alaska were] Waskey [Frank Hinman] and Tom Cale who served for two sessions after Waskey's short session. According to Wickersham, Cale decided not to run again and Wickersham

filed [his candidacy] and got handsomely elected since he was well known in Fairbanks and in Nome. He got re-elected 1910 and 1912, but 1914 there was re-interest in Democrat circles although they were divided.

So called Progressive Democrats decided to support Wickersham, including Gaustad [Ole Peter?] and E.B. [Ernest B.] Collins along with some of the others. They filed as non-partisans and got handsomely elected. The Democratic Party was in a bad shape because they were so divided, but they held an assembly in Skagway and Bunnell wound up with a nomination for candidacy. Wickersham beat Bunnell, who was appointed as the judge of the 4th Division after Judge [Frederick E.] Fuller resigned, possibly due to ill health.

Frank worked as a deputy marshal from 1915 onward, right when Bunnell took office in January of 1915. Frank thinks he was already established as a marshal when L. [Lewis] T. Erwin was appointed. Presidential appointments were: the judge, the district attorney, the marshal, and the postmaster.

Bunnell received a big reception from the people in town when he became the judge, or perhaps it was from the Democratic Party. He had run for the Democrats.

Interviewer mentions having seen a place called the Auditorium in the old papers [where the gathering was held]. That was the old Moose Hall, where a big dance and the reception were held [in honor of Bunnell]. Harmonie Hall was on 3rd Avenue, on the other side of Noble Street. Harmonie Hall was not too big and it was maintained by the Harmonie Society which was sponsored by local German organization. They would go there to sing and dance and Frank used to play piano in the orchestra there. They had beer steins all over the piano, so much so that Frank could hardly play. They had lots of fancy food, big platters of hamburger, rice and bread. Mentioning Fairbanks German colony. Interviewer had noticed Harmonie Hall being mentioned as a place for political activities.

Bunnell was very well liked by the public, and he was known to be an honest individual. In those times, life in regards to law and order was a lot different than it is now. It was frontier justice. Frank recalls an incident where a married man raped a girl and got 15 years. "Old Bunnell, he just slapped it to him." It was like the old North-West Mounted Police. Interviewer confirms: there was no dilly-dallying with reprieves or mistrials or the like, they just slapped the book [of law] at him [the accused] and get it over with.

Bunnell set [inaudible] to hang here. The first one was [a Montenegrin named] Milo Segura who was charged with murder of a mine owner in Iditarod by the name of William Riley. Segura was convicted of a premeditated murder. He had waited this fellow to come along on a trail and shot him on back. There was no question about his guilt. Segura was cutting wood for Riley and there was a dispute about getting paid. The guy [Segura] claimed Riley owed him, but Riley said he had paid and so Segura shot him in the back.

Segura was in the jail for a year and a half before they hung him. He educated himself by reading books and learning to type on a typewriter. He had some money while he was in there. Then the Montenegrin Society [Montenegro was part of the former Yugoslavia] was petitioning on behalf of him to get a new

trial, but the appeal was turned down by the Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. That was as far as any cases would go those days. When they were ready to hang him, he bought a new suit and said good bye to the boys there "just like he was taking a trip on a boat, you know, dressed up for this hanging." When he got up on the scaffold, he wouldn't stand up so they had to strap him to a board and drop him, which broke his neck. It took three minutes for his heart to stop beating. Frank was witnessing that as a deputy marshal, and Dr. Sutherland [was the doctor].

Right adjacent to the old Courthouse was a Fairbanks Banking Company building which was vacant during that time so they built a hallway from one building to another, made a trap door on the second floor and put some 2x10s up aside and across for the rope and then stood him [the convict] on the trap door, letting him hang between the two buildings. That was the first hanging in Fairbanks.

At that time, Bunnell had already been a judge for two or three years, so it was around 1916 or 1917.

The second hanging was for a native from Shageluk Slough [spelling checked]. He had a cousin who had a nice looking wife. He became infatuated with her and whenever the husband went out on the trap-line, he moved in. He killed the husband and disemboweled him and sowed a big rock on his stomach, sewing it up with a skin needle. Then he threw the body into Shageluk Slough which is in the Iditarod country. A week later the babiche [sinew he used to sew the rock in] started to rot, the rock came out and the body floated. Long story short, it came up that this guy killed the husband, perhaps the wife told about it. He was set by Bunnell to hang.

The guy confessed the murder and said he was sorry, but "sorry or no sorry, them days law was law."

Interviewer says he'd like to hear details of the hanging and that he doesn't have to write it in his book.

Frank doesn't remember the Indian's fancy name. They were ready to hang him and the chief [unclear], whose name was Miller, told Frank, or the interpreter Mrs. Callahan [probably Ellen Callahan] who was Dan Callahan's wife, that the prisoner could have a drink of whisky if he wanted. This was an hour before hanging. Mrs. Callahan told this to the prisoner who said he would like the drink right now. They used to have whisky in the cabinet for sicknesses. Frank poured a big water glass full and the prisoner drank it like he was drinking water. Then Miller told Frank to tell the interpreter that the prisoner can have another one whenever he wants it. She talked to the prisoner and came to tell that "He said he'd take it now." After two glasses of whiskey, he was intoxicated. He was doing Indian dance and song.

Frank was standing below the scaffold with Dr. Sutherland. There was another chief deputy up there, and down comes this guy. His head detached from the body and landed right on Frank's feet, blood spilling out, just like a broken gallon jug of water. There was no stain on the rope, his neck was just severed. Doctor said it was softening of the bones due to syphilis. The person weighed 180 pounds and he dropped 10 feet so his head was just yanked off. Those days Frank was "the youngest one on the bunch" and as a result, got all the dirty work, to the point where he thought about quitting.

The third hanging was also an Indian but he was down from Big River, from Kuskokwim. He was called Little Johnny. It was a drunken brawl. They got into a disagreement about some muskrat skins, and when Little John was in "high key," he got a rifle and shot him [the victim].

Frank says the following is between Frank and the interviewer: Frank used to have a couple of trustees "upstairs" and he used to take boys up there to take a bath in the bathroom there. Frank had one of them cleaning the windows and he came downstairs saying "that thing is ready to fall out," meaning the 2x8s nailed against the logs around windowsills. Might have been 4x8. The bars go into another frame made of solid steel. The bars were hooked into the solid frame and that was nailed into the 4x8 frame. Some guy had a hacksaw and he had hacksawed it all way around in a big [unclear]. The guy who noticed said you could just take the window out and set it on the floor. Frank told him to put it back and leave it alone. This was a week before the hanging. [Thus, there was a weak point in the jail and Frank didn't want it to be fixed.]

One day Frank asked Little-Johnny if he knew they were going to hang him and he said yes, after which Frank asked if Little-Johnny would like to get out of there [jail]. Johnny said "No, I don't want to get out." Frank doesn't remember whether he told Johnny how to get out or no, but he felt sorry for the guy because it [the murder] was just a drunken mix-up. Johnny said he wanted to pay for his sins. Frank never told him how to get out. That was the third person to be hanged and the hanging went well.

There was no animosity against Bunnell for these hangings. The interviewer talks about frontier law that was sometimes harsh and talks about how Bunnell finished his first four years in 1919 and in Washington, D.C. the U.S. Senate wouldn't reconfirm him because the Republicans were back in power and never did a second term. He served for three more years, however, on recess appointments from the President. . Frank doesn't know what Wickersham's charges against Bunnell were, but believes the effort to be entirely politically motivated ("big politics"). Bunnell was ousted because he was a Democrat.

Frank wants to talk more about the third hanging in hopes that what he said doesn't portray him as a desperado of any kind. He doesn't know whether he would have told Little-Johnny about the escape or not, but Johnny didn't want to know. He wanted to die. Interviewer is talking about capital punishment and how it isn't practiced in many states anymore.

Discussing floating courts: They held sessions in Ruby and in Iditarod, Bethel, and Kuskokwim. Aniak too was still in this division as well as Eagle. They [Eagle?] had a deputy marshal by the name of Hempel [possibly, Frank doesn't recall exactly]. Hempel was drafted and Frank was sent down to fill in for him which he did until he [Frank] was relieved by another deputy named Woodin (sp?).

Frank doesn't recall Bunnell house. [End of recording.]