

Call number: ORAL HISTORY 02-00-64-17

Narrator: George and LaVern Keys

Interviewer: William (Bill) Cashen

Date: 08/13/1971

Place: University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska.

Summary created by: Varpu M Lotvonen

Date of summary created: 8/16/13

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

Series: William Cashen Collection

Bill Cashen tells Mrs. Keys was Charles Bunnell's first secretary and a year or so after that, George Keys showed up as a mining short course student and later he became the superintendent of the power-plant. Keys's were "here" [at the University?] until 1935, so they are back to the campus now and Cashen tells that he already showed them his work with the early days of the College. Cashen's book is going to be largely biographical.

George says that one of their early janitors, a head janitor, didn't like to be in work clothes on account of the girls and Bunnell told George to tell the janitor that Bunnell had carried through [unclear, the pigs?] past the girls' dormitories when he went to school. Bunnell was very fond of those memories of Bucknell and he was a very loyal alumnus.

The University almost lost Bunnell in the early days. Bloom and Lavery wanted to get Bunnell out of the presidency and they were keeping Morton Stevens drunk so he wouldn't be able to vote. Stevens was the Chairman of the Board [of Trustees]. Dan was one of the trustees and he came to George and said that they are going to vote Bunnell out "unless we can keep Morton Stevens sober." George said he didn't see how that could be done so Holly [unclear who this is] said they could invite him to their home. After initial refusal George agreed to do that. Morton Stevens was in bad shape after binging for a while. Lavery and Bloom were keeping him drunk so he couldn't vote. Cashen says he was sober by the time of the meeting, but it was a 5 to 3 split. Talking about the vote: Stevens would vote for Dr. Bunnell if he voted. If it wouldn't have been for Dan and George, Bunnell would have been voted out.

3:28 [Unclear] plan one part there. Cashen tells about his interview with Bob Bloom and how Bob is still sorry he didn't get Bunnell out. Cashen also mentions how proud Bob was for the fact that the Alumni Association made him into an honorary member in 1950. LaVern points out that he never had a college education. Cashen says he didn't, but the Alumni decided to give him an honorary membership card. Cashen talks about how Bloom thought Mrs. Keys gave it to him although she had been gone for a long time.

LaVern gets the Alumnus magazine, and Cashen tells that Audrey Loftus decided at some point that lots of the people who had been on the faculty and staff were put onto the Alumni mailing list.

Talking about Wickersham's politics. Dr. Bunnell was an ardent Democrat, says LaVern. Cashen says that Judge Wickersham kept Bunnell from getting reconfirmed in his judgeship. He served a four-year term and three years of another term as a judge, but the senate would never confirm the second four-year appointment because Wickersham charged him with using the office for political purposes. George says that made Bunnell sore, and Cashen confirms that Bunnell couldn't abide Wickersham. [LaVern says something indiscernible. Cross talking.]

When LaVerna first came to the University, he and Mr. Wickersham [unclear]. Cashen says it was a bad word to mention around.

Cashen is talking about the Dempsey case: Dempsey was a double-murderer who was sentenced to death by Bunnell [the sentence was never carried out, but it was changed to a life in prison], and who haunted Bunnell, pleading for release. Cashen says he is going to include the case in his book.

Cashen talks about how Bunnell's health was failing. LaVern tells that Bunnell came to her place and asked her to write his memoir. [LaVern doesn't want the story recorded and the recorder is turned off.]

Interview resumes with a story about how Bunnell asked Miss Jorgenson to sit at his table for dinner when she was returning from her vacation. "Oh", she says, "Doctor Bunnell I don't have any education to sit at your table and eat with you." "Well, Miss Jorgenson, I don't have any either," replied Bunnell.

Tom Ek used to get an extra head of celery and he was crazy about green stuff. He put the head of celery besides him and when Tom had a mouthful, Bunnell came by and snatched the celery so Tom didn't have celery. Cashen tells that Tom was a vegetarian. LaVern says he is a wonderful man and that he is in the states now, in Connecticut. He lived in Chicago for a long time and worked as an engineer and then he was in Bangkok for many years. He is still working, currently on some big bridge. Discussing his demeanor: He was a vigorous and strong man who didn't drink or smoke.

Cashen wants to quote a letter from LaVern to Bunnell in his book. LaVern wrote it to Bunnell while he was in Washington and Bunnell wanted to know everything that was going on at the campus and so LaVern told him everything that might interest him. Cashen doesn't quote from another letter in which LaVern tells about a girl "who was getting in trouble." [Break in the recording.]

George is talking about a smoke stack and how they were going to get it up. It was for a little upright boiler. Some teachers were talking that George can't put the stack up and Bunnell got worried about it. Bunnell started pestering George about it, but George just said he will get it up and that he has been doing things like that all his life. 13:16 The day George was ready to put it up he never [unclear]. He was watching from the window and when George got steam up, Charley Wheeler and Joe Flackne watched the guy-lines. They pulled it up and put it in place. Bunnell came down with tears in his eyes and said that everybody doubted George but [unclear]. Bunnell gave him a check for \$100 saying that they don't have much money but [unclear]. It was fairly high, 72-feet [smoke stack].

After they used it for 10 years, she [the smoke stack] “settled down in the middle”. George went to talk to Paul Hopkins about that and he said it was because the sulfur in the coal condenses at a certain place and water runs down making sulfuric gas that cuts through the steam, cuts the rivets. George hated to go tell Bunnell that they have to take the stack down. He told Bunnell the bad news and Bunnell asked him to take the pipe down safely. They toppled it over. Cashen says this happened around 1934. George was a boiler maker.

Another thing that George never told anybody was that one night George had his father helping him during the first year with the new boiler. He drained all the water out of the boiler one night, but it didn't get burned too badly. George talks about how he noticed changes in the valves that lead him to discover that the water was out. He never told Bunnell. George worked days and nights and tried to cat-nap during daytime. George got her [the boiler] going again and LaVern, who was working for Bunnell, ordered new tubes for the boiler that George paid for. They got through the winter and in the spring George asked Bunnell to come down to talk with him. George told him what had happened, took a full responsibility and told Bunnell that he wants to pay for it and has already paid for the new tubes. Bunnell started to cry and said that he has even more faith towards George and that he doesn't have to pay for the tubes. The occurrence has bothered George all these years and he still has nightmares of the brand-new boiler being burnt. Discussing what happens if a boiler is heated empty: tubes lose their tension. [George is telling how he fixed the boiler when the phone rings and the recording is stopped.]

About Maxi[sp?] who told other students that Bunnell had kicked him out “on one point.” Some of the boys were working for George so Bunnell went to talk with him. He told George that men like George and Tom Ek [?] and Al Doors [?] and Jake Doors [?] were honorable and stood by [unclear.] Bunnell told George that he had to dismiss Maxi Miller, the students are on strike, and that “George's boys are in with him.” [Unclear] against Maxi and he's only told about one [Unclear]. George called the boys in and said that they have only told about one, but Bunnell came and showed a letter with 5 counts against Maxi. George advised them to read the letter and then go apologize to Bunnell. They apologized to Bunnell and one of them said he had never apologized to anybody. George said he can always commence. Everything was smoothed out. Discussing what Maxi would think about his actions as an adult.

Cashen says he wanted to show Keys' the archives, but George has one little story more: Their first vacation was two weeks and they were going on the highway. They left on Saturday morning and got back Saturday evening, with one weekend in-between. Bunnell was sore about it being 15 days and it didn't dawn on George that they had taken 15 days because he thought that from Saturday morning to Saturday evening was 14 days. He and Bunnell had quite an argument about that and George claimed he was petty after all the overtime George had put in. Then he went to see the calendar and noticed that it was 15 day vacation, but never apologized because Bunnell was mean to him. Cashen tells that sometimes with him it was best to just clam up and stop talking.

Once before Bunnell tried to argue with George about certain wire size to which George reasoned that he wouldn't try to tell Bunnell how to run the University. Bunnell let him order the wire he needed.

Cashen is talking about a picture of Bunnell that was taken when he was really sick. The pictures were sent to Ziegler who painted a portrait. It was unveiled during an Emeritus Ceremony. Most everybody thought it was terrible and Bunnell hated it with a vengeance. Some people think that that motivated Bunnell to get better because when he did, he went to Seattle and got his portrait taken by a good photographer. Then he took that picture to Ziegler who painted a new portrait of him. It's a beautiful portrait and Bunnell took that to the University and the other one was taken to the vault.

LaVern says that there is one in Earl Beistline's office. Cashen says that that was the one that was taken in 1952 or 1953 when he had regained his health and looked fine. LaVern doesn't like the one on the bronze plaque. Cashen talks putting pictures in his book. [Phone rings. Recording ends.]