

ORAL HISTORY 2019-01-07

Mike Dalton with Libby Dalton present

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen Brewster, interviewer

Series: Kathleen "Mike" Dalton Life History Recordings

Mike Dalton talked about the News-miner. After they had moved from Barrow to Fairbanks in 1954 they didn't have a house to live in. Housing was kind of hard to find. They moved into the Dixon apartments. Living above them was the Wilkin family. Doris Wilkin had been secretary to Justice Rabinowitz for many years. Gary Wilkin was a tall man. He later became interested in politics and was elected to the state senate. Bobby Wilkin is noted for his brewery. The Wilkin family liked to be outdoors. They would ski in the winter. They went out ice fishing one time and their van sank.

Dalton was doing interviews in 1973 in Rampart. She interviewed Antoinette [Mayo?] who was about eighty. She had a twin sister. When the steamboats would come down the river they would stand on the bluff and wave to everyone. They were known up and down the Yukon as the beautiful twins. One spring when there was a bad break up on the Yukon it backed up into Rampart Village. Ice jams break off and go up on the bank and sometimes run up over cabins. When she was there they had a lot of damage from the ice. In one log house the marshal kept his records. She read through the log books. She was reading cases from 1898 and 1899. There hadn't been any American law anywhere except an occasional visit by Judge Wickersham. A marshal was sent out when there was a problem. One of the deputies came into court with a young Native man. The young man had stopped on the main street and urinated. They were trying to introduce civilization to Rampart and now this common practice was being banned.

Brewster asked her when she started working for the News miner. Dalton she started working for them in 1961. She wanted to work for the extra income. Her husband was working on a report for the Alaska Industrial Development Board. They were up in Barrow from 1954 to 1957 when the DEW Line was being constructed. She went into the News-miner when they returned to Fairbanks. Snedden was the publisher. George Sunborne was the editor at that time. They hired her. She said she was never fired so they figured she could write. She had good grammar practices. She worked with the News-miner until April 1, 1970. Karen Purdue was a junior editor at the newspaper. Perdue later worked in Ted Stevens office as an intern and later a staff member. Don Dennis was the sports editor and Chuck Hoyt was a sports writer. When she first started, they didn't have a photographer. One man who had a photography studio would be hired by the newspaper when they needed photographs. His name was Phil Hoon. Leroy Shanks worked on the presses. They used a linotype process. She explained the process. They had to learn to read upside down and backwards. They used the Associated Press teletype. She did whatever they wanted her to do. Some days she was the main reporter. She talked about the bomb that exploded under a man's car. He was part of the unsavory crowd. The man survived the car bomb, but later died in a bar brawl. She would answer the phone when people called the newsroom and send the call over to the editor. One day they didn't have any news for the front page. Jim Krouse called in and reported the birders had seen a blue goose. The editor ran it as a headline story. Dalton talked about some of the big stories she worked on. In 1964 she reported on the big earthquake. It was the same day Emil Usibelli

died. He was killed at Usibelli Mine. The assistant editor was John Wilson. Snedden had a conference with Wilson and Dalton and a couple of others. Associated Press kept publishing any news they could find. There was no contact between Fairbanks and Valdez. They decided to go down the Richardson Highway. Wilson and Dalton drove down in a jeep. They headed down to Anchorage. The epicenter was north of Valdez in the general vicinity of Glennallen. They took all their survival gear. The Parks Highway didn't exist at that time. There hadn't been contact between Fairbanks and Glennallen, Sourdough, or Paxson. In Glennallen they had outfitted themselves as a rescue area. Some Valdez people had made their way up. Bonnie Williams and her husband, David, who lived in the Goldstream Valley were shortwave people and had made contact with Valdez, but Dalton didn't know this until afterwards. Florence Weber had packed up her gear and headed to Valdez. She found out later about the shortwave contact between Valdez and Fairbanks, but when it first happened nobody knew anything. They got to Glennallen and talked with some of the refugees and found out what had happened in Valdez. They headed down to Anchorage and were able to get around the landslides. Jim Moody was down in Anchorage during the earthquake. When they got to Anchorage, they saw a lot of holes in the road. They carried fuel with them. They were able to get gas when they got to Anchorage. They drove around Anchorage taking photos and talking with people. They composed stories and telephoned them back to Fairbanks. When they got downtown to the high-rise areas they would stop when there was something of interest and phone their office. The Anchorage Times and the Anchorage News were the newspapers at the time. The Anchorage News was flattened. The Anchorage Times didn't have any equipment to publish. The editor told them to pack up their gear and come back to Fairbanks. They developed their photos right away and put out a special earthquake edition. They would bundle up the newspapers and ship them to Anchorage. They took them to refugee centers. On March 27, 1964 she was sitting at her desk and got news about Usibelli getting killed at his mine. Her story about him was a small piece on the front page of the paper because of all the earthquake news. They had a photo lab at the newspaper. The newspaper had a full-time photographer at that time. She did get to Valdez. All the homes were still standing, but they had been washed over by the tsunami. Valdez was situated on a glacial moraine. The earthquake turned the moraine into mud and the pressure forced the mud up into the houses. It devastated the houses. The ground was thawed underneath the houses. Governor Walker was a boy at that time and rode out the earthquake with his father. Egan was in Juneau at the time. Red Cross was active in Anchorage at the time. Dalton said there were 31-32 people lost in Valdez. Mostly on the dock. They brought newspapers to Valdez, too. She traveled to Anchorage for about a week and a half. She was assigned to go to Valdez. There were quite a few ham radio operators in contact with Valdez. Eventually the Anchorage Times was able to start publishing again.

Dalton also reported on the 1967 flood. The Anchorage Times printed papers and sent them up to Fairbanks that time. The News Miner was located on Second Avenue at that time. She did a lot of coverage on the flood. The editor divided up Fairbanks and she was assigned a section to report on. She took off with her camera. She left her car at University Ave where the railroad tracks were. There was only about 12 inches of water there. Most people lost their cars. She was assigned the College area, University and the airport and everything in between. She traveled around by boat. She retrieved her car afterwards and the only problem she had was the muddy, sandy water had got into the brakes. She just hitchhiked rides on boats. In 1965 the paper bought Rolleiflex cameras and she was assigned one to take when she went out reporting. In her office the flood got up to her chair. She found out the governor was coming. She hitched a ride on a boat to meet up with Hickel. There was a military helicopter waiting to take Hickel around. His chief of staff was with him, Paul Ryan. Hickel asked her to

come with him. The chief of staff was told to take the next chopper. She took a lot of aerial photos. Their office was flooded but they could still work there. The papers were printed there. She didn't come home during the flood. She slept one night in the ACS building. When they were flying in the helicopter, they did land at the high school and the university. She reported on how the flood affected the people. The pioneer home had just opened. E.B. Collins was the only resident at the time.

Brewster asked if she reported on crime stories. Dalton said the police was on her beat. She would read the police bulletin which had everything that happened that day. The city police also had the ambulance service. One morning she checked out the ambulance service and saw it had picked up a woman outside of the 49er Club and she was frozen. The state troopers didn't have anything on their blotter. Don McQuinn was the head of the troopers and he didn't trust reporters. He was surprised Dalton knew about the woman freezing to death. She also had the mortician on her beat named Marvin. She called the mortician to ask about people he had. There was a death on the Arctic Slope. The man was from Texas and wanted to return home. The bush plane had picked up everyone and told the man he couldn't take him and all of his belongings. The conditions were bad. The man walked back to camp and got lost. The man wasn't dressed for the weather. The mortician told Dalton what the man was wearing. This was in 1966.

Dalton said she had 32 refugees at her house during the flood. Libby was at the Girl Scout camp at Birch Lake. George was the house mother for the refugees since she was away from the home. She knew most of the people staying at her house. Her husband was up on the North Slope and wanted to go home. Her husband felt better when he found out who was staying at the house including one of his friends, John Clark and his family. Clark took out a welding outfit to use for cooking. Lena and Oscar Phipps were also at her house. Leo and Freddie Brown and daughters were also at her house. Dalton said they were the lucky people in the hills. About two weeks after the flood there was another chance of more flooding. It wasn't as intense as the August flood.

Brewster asked about Chuck Grey. Dalton said Grey brought color printing to the News miner. Grey was born in Fairbanks. He did news reporting early on. He was a big game hunter including polar bears. Libby asked about editors. Dalton said after the big flood they had a change in leadership. Merlin Spencer was the new editor. He had a lot of experience with AP. Their deadline was 5:00 p.m. the day before. Dave Galloway came before the earthquake. He was a good editor and writer. She was good friends with him. Merlin Spencer made a few changes with the paper. He had been with the AP for years. He recognized the value with each one of them on the newspaper. Galloway went on to be editor of the Los Angeles Times.