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Hal Romig, Woody Johansen, Claus Naske, Merritt Helfferich, Don Cook and Joan Ostercamp talk about life as a student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks at a meeting of the University of Alaska Alumni Association on September 13, 1982 at Fairbanks, Alaska

Archives at Elmer E. Rasmuson Library

Fairbanks, Alaska

Unidentified man (lots of background noises) says there will be storytelling from different people from each decade from 1920-1970s.

Unidentified man (Hal Romig) said he came to the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines in 1927 mostly to play basketball. He had help from a chemistry professor. He would be absent six or seven weeks a school year to play basketball. His sister was ten years older than he was. She brought him the news about the young college every day. The college gave her a chance for a higher education. Most of the students came from Fairbanks. About the time he arrived they were putting out a couple of students a year (graduating). He talked about the three Loftus brothers and the McCombe brothers. They played basketball. They did not have a gym. His father thought it would be better for him to live on campus. He found it easy to live away from home. Thompson later went into the diplomatic corps and he was the taxi driver in town. The drinking was moderate on campus. Dr. Bunnell was very severe about drinking on campus. It was with extreme trepidation that they would take a drink on campus. His sister's wedding was dry. He said that wasn't much for the Romig family. His sister married Art Davy. They had the reception at the 18 mile roadhouse. The university had many trials and it was a struggle for Dr. Bunnell to keep the campus going. Bill Cashen wrote about the history of the college. There was a contest in Fairbanks to name the new gold course. It was named the Farthest-North Gold Course. The term "farthest north" is used often.

He talked about the college. He considered it just a step above high school. There were as many professors as there were students. They didn't have a lot of advanced degrees. He finished at Stanford. His feelings have always been centered at the college. He talked about the chemistry professor helping him. He thought his paper in chemistry was such a fraud that he stole it out of the library when he returned for a visit. His sister came here the second year of the university. His home was always full of admiration for the college. He got to know all of the older students. When he arrived at the college at the age of sixteen it was to play basketball. He was on a winning team. He has played basketball all of his life. The dormitory originally had men and women. The rest of the students lived in Fairbanks and commuted daily. They came by trolley. They were dropped at the bottom of the hill and had to walk up the hill. Some other students lived in a log cabin close to campus. Campus life was an extension backwards of the present life. There were students suffered hardships such as the lack of money. Many students didn't finish their education in just four years. He is proud that he attended the college even if it was just for one year. Question from the audience. He talked about taking a tour through the

southeast while on the basketball team. He talked about the roughness of the basketball games. He doesn't like the idea of recruitment for sports teams at the college level. He said he would like to see sports relegated to the intramural stage. Question about his transfer. He said he went to a seminary school and then to Stanford. He did get a D while he was attending the college at Fairbanks. He talked about his basketball coach. He talked about the caliber of the college when he was attending school. Dr. Bunnell had an honorary doctor's degree. He is pleased to see that many of the professors now hold higher degrees. He believes that education should come first over sports in college.

Unidentified person talked about a photo taken on campus during the 1930s. He introduces Woody Johansen. He served on the faculty in the 1950s and served on the Road Commission.

Woody Johansen was from the class of 1940. Woody Johansen said he feels that he is pinch hitting for Bill Cashen. Before he came to the college he lived in Cordova. It was a railroad town. His reason for coming to the university was to become a railroad engineer. He became a highway engineer instead. In 1933 when he first arrived at the college you came by train or over the Richardson Highway. It was a two day trip from Seward. When they arrived in early September it was beautiful. There were beautiful farms. Joe Flakne decided to take them to town. They went to town by the Farmer's Loop Road. They were in a horse drawn wagon. When they got to town they walked home by the railroad track. When you arrived by train at the foot of the hill there was a railroad depot. You were met by a welcoming committee. They took the bags up the hill but you had to walk up to the school. At that time the buildings on campus were just a few buildings and the dormitories. They had just moved the gymnasium to the new building. They also had military science classes there. He talked about the garage on campus. There was a men's dorm and a girl's dorm. It was also the restaurant and dining hall. He had to work as the campus butcher to finance his education. He had gone to the meat market and studied the diagrams about how to butcher beef when he was in Cordova. He made interesting cuts that were hard to identify. Dr. Bunnel's home was at the main entrance to the campus. He wonders if it was strategically located. They had no lawns. In the 1930s there were woods located as close to the campus as the student union building. They hunted grouse and rabbits in the woods. He talked about Professor Fuller who was researching the aurora in 1933. He always remembers the campus as a place where he worked. He was also the handyman around the kitchen. In September it was time to dig potatoes. They grew their own potatoes at the college. Before he was a student the area between the college road and Farmer's Loop they had musk ox. He always thinks of Ivar Skarland when he thought about the musk ox who was hired as a hunter to kill the bears that predated on the musk ox. A substantial part of the campus was an experimental farm. It was put under the college. Dr. Bunnell was utilizing every bit of produce from the farm. All of the milk came from the farm as well as their vegetables. The meat also came from the farm. They would slaughter the animals at the farm and then give him the carcass to butcher.

Break in recording.

Unidentified person (Don Cook?) talked about the impact of WWII on the college. There was a feeling of uncertainty. The student body declined. President Bunnell fought to get financial support. During the construction of Ft. Wainwright the university housed the army. He returned in December of 1945. In

1946 the GI Bill started its impact. He graduated in 1947. There were only five graduates: himself, Ben Atkinson, Forest Per, Grace Schaible and Ted Cox. The ability to keep the college going was due to Dr. Bunnell. He performed many functions. He wouldn't have changed his experience. He felt he received a good education and values.

Unidentified person talks about a photo of the campus from 1954. He introduced Claus Naske.

Claus Naske said he graduated from Palmer High School in 1956 and then worked for the Alaska Road Commission. In November 1956 he was laid off from work. In January of 1957 he went up to Fairbanks because it was cheap housing. It was -40 or -50 degrees. He enrolled in college. He was assigned to Nerland Hall. Jack Distad was the supervisor in the hall. He had dogs which he fed salmon. The whole dormitory smelled of salmon. He enrolled in classes but gradually dropped classes. The Constitutional Convention had been recently held in Fairbanks. He left after one semester to work. When it was cold again in the fall he attended college. He started taking classes that he enjoyed. Lola Tilly tried to get him to take home economics. He took classes from Ivar Skarland. Doc Wilson was the chemistry professor. He took courses from Herman Slotnik. Soon he got a job on campus. Most of the students worked on campus. He worked as the campus photographer. He had to attend the occasions. There were close relationships between the faculty and students. President Patty and his wife would come to the campus coffee shop to talk with the students in the evenings. Harry Groom was a geology professor who taught him how to do photography. He also took classes from Lee Salisbury and Minnie Wells. President Patty sponsored his naturalization in town. Dean of students was Edward Wolstadz. He talked about Betty Lister Watson. In the winter there were double windows. Students would keep their beer cold in the windows as well as their game meat. There was once someone in the dorms who blasted silverfish with a gun which reverberated throughout the dorms. Sunday dinners were a tradition. Claus said the food was good at the college. A student played piano during the dinner hour. He attended school with some interesting people. Kenneth Lowney was an Aleut who became a civil engineer. Charlie Smeltzer, Don Rosen, and Hank Kaiser were fellow students. Hank Kaiser bragged that he served under four presidents before he graduated. Hank Kaiser once hitchhiked to the Mayo Clinic for a major heart operation. He also attended school with Brini Muir, Clay Nesbett, Jerry and Bernie Ivy. He met his wife in 1959 and married in 1960. They lived in student housing where the walls were very thin. Some of them had traplines which ran up to President Patty's house where they would snare rabbits. Most of them had cars which didn't run in the winter and they would use the trunks to store game meat. The students were generally poor. When he attended school the majority of the students were men. He got his degree in 1961. He then attended the University of Michigan which was a much larger university. To his surprise he realized that he knew as much as his fellow students there. He feels like he had a good education from the University of Alaska. The campus was primitive. The library was small and some volumes had to be from interlibrary loan. He enjoyed the close relationship between the faculty and the students. When he travels throughout Alaska he runs into people that attended the University of Alaska. After graduate studies he was offered a position in the history department at the University of Alaska. Claus talked about Harry Groom and Harry's burial at sea.

Unidentified person talks about a photo taken in the 1960s. Constitution Plaza was used as a parking lot at that time. He remembers the basement of the dormitory was used as a cutting room during hunting season. He introduces Merritt Helfferich who graduated in 1966.

Merritt Helfferich said he attended school with Claus Naske. He arrived in 1958 and graduated in 1966. The University of Alaska was the fourth college he attended.