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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

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Archives at Elmer E. Rasmuson Library

Fairbanks, Alaska

Woody Johansen talks about the galloyak. They were a cross between a Galloway cow and a yak. It was an experiment to see if these animals were good for Interior Alaska. It was part of the Biological Survey work. By the time he arrived the experiment was considered a failure so he had to butcher the animals. They were good eating. In 1933 when he first enrolled there were about 120 students and 18 faculty. It was a small, isolated school and the faculty and students were close. He enrolled in civil engineering, but many of his friends were mining engineers. A popular course was home economics. There were a lot of men enrolled in home economics. Many of them were prospecting and they learned techniques in home economics for cooking and baking. Agriculture, business and general science were popular courses. He talked about transportation. He wished present-day people could have seen the roads in 1933. The faculty and students who lived in town took a bus operated by Paul Greimann. Paul was an energetic young man. The Alaska Road Commission didn't cooperate with him. The road from Fairbanks and College wasn't more than a trail. In the spring faculty and students had to walk the route because of conditions of the road. Paul Greimann started out with a small bus. He had to increase the size of the bus and he did it by himself. In the winter the Road Commission didn't maintain roads. Paul used a plow on the front of his bus and kept the road open. He talked about President Bunnell. He considered him a great man. Bunnell had a big battle getting the school going and keeping it going. He attended all the legislative sessions to raise money for the college. He also went to Washington for federal help. He traveled by railroad and steamboat. The boats stopped in every port. Bunnell went to the schools at every port and talked to the students about the college. He also set up a program to give exams in all the high schools. The students who got the highest grade in the exams got free room at the university for a year. Bunnell had a tremendous concern for the students. There was no smoking allowed on campus. The buildings were frame wood and the floors were oiled which was a great fire danger. He insisted that the dorm windows be closed. He would make rounds and check the windows himself. The university generated its own power. President Bunnell's house was strategically placed so he could see everything. One night Woody and a friend went walking down to the experimental farm with a bottle of wine. He had to work the next day and wasn't feeling very good. Dr. Bunnell came to visit him to check to see how he was feeling knowing what he had been up to the night before. He wanted to attend the fur rondy in Anchorage. He was given permission by President Bunnell to attend. Dr. Bunnell explained to Woody how responsible he was for the students. In those days things would be delivered to the campus by bus and dropped in the garage. Dr. Bunnell found a bottle of liquor and he delivered it personally to the girl who had ordered it. Woody said the university was Bunnell. Without his dedication

Woody felt that the university wouldn't have made it. Bunnell used his own money to pay faculty salaries. Bunnell also borrowed money from local merchants. Everyone who was at the university was here because they wanted to be. Most people were working their way through college. Bunnell was also a poet who loved to write. Woody reads one of Dr. Bunnell's writings.

Unidentified person talks about a photo of the university campus. He said as a student he remembers stealing a bell off of the roof of the powerhouse. They took it back to their dorm. It ultimately became the trophy for the bell tournament. He introduces Don Cook who will be representing the 1940s.

Don Cook said he called Bill Jacobsen and asked him where the alumnus meeting was going to be. Bill said the archives of course. Don talked about varying first impressions of the UA. He said if we compare the growth of the university to the growth of a child there are periods that bring out the worst or the best in the development pattern. There are the terrible twos. He said he was at the university during the fitful 1940s. It was uncertain and unsettled. Those were the war years and there was confusion about the future of the university. The continuance of the university was uncertain at that time, too. He first heard about the college in 1937. He was in California. He ran across a catalog from the University of Alaska. It was a far cry from the present campaigns of current time. He was born in Oregon. He wrote a letter to the university to see if it still existed. He was surprised to receive a letter from the president with a simple application form. He is sure this has changed. In 1939 it was a little complicated getting to Alaska. He took a steamboat to Seward and then boarded a train. The "student special" was a special train in the fall. After seven days on the steamboat Columbia his exuberance had diminished. There were 10 or 15 other students on the same boat. They came from all over the United States. It was an unusual trip. Very stormy. Everybody on the boat was sick including the captain and the cook. Don was in bed for three days. At Seward he boarded the train. They stopped along the way and picked up more students. The train could be flagged down for passengers. It was a time when Anchorage was smaller than Fairbanks. His first impressions of the college were not very favorable. He remembers walking up the muddy, slippery road up to the campus when he got off the train. The facilities were: a three-story wood structure, three men's dormitories, a concrete structure housing the library and the gym. There were other concrete buildings such as the power plant and Harriet Hess Hall. The men lived in the old wooden dorms and the women had the concrete structure. It was a friendly family like atmosphere on campus. The staff and faculty were dedicated. There were about 300 students mostly men. The men were probably on average in their mid-twenties. Several options were available for the financially strapped. Many worked part time. President Bunnell gave personal loans to students. Summer employment was available. Students would make enough money in the summer to finance another school year. The faculty were understanding about summer work. They allowed students to leave early in the spring and come back to school later in the fall so they were able to work a longer period of time. They had to make up the work.

Unidentified person (Merritt Helfferich?) said he came from Pennsylvania. He talked about finding a slim catalog for the University of Alaska. Eventually he sent in an application to the University of Alaska and was accepted. He drove his new sports car from the east coast to Alaska. He had never been further west than eastern Pennsylvania. He talked about arriving in Dawson Creek. The rest of the trip was a disaster. He drove up the Alaska Highway and arrived in Fairbanks on a sunny day. His car was

completely covered with dust. He drove out to campus and he was delighted with what he found. He signed up with the university fire department. This gave him free room. Having a job with the fire department probably kept him in Alaska. His talked about his roommate, Charles Vernon. After going to town to pick up Charles (who was drunk) he returned by College Road. It was -45 or -50 at the time. They spotted a house fire and stopped to help. Someone called the university fire department. They started shoveling snow into the house while they waited. Charles was directing people and grabbed a hose. He told Merritt to go up on the roof and chop a hole in the roof. Charles went up the ladder and fell off the roof with the hose. He picked up the hose and started up the ladder. He was completely covered in ice. They were both up on the roof. Someone behind them asked them how the fire was started and proceeded to interview them. The fire was put out and they returned home. They woke up in the middle of the night to respond to a fire call. The fire was at the same house.

Merritt took classes from Minnie Wells and Bogard (?) The university was growing at this time. Merritt talked about Dr. Patty having aluminum foil put over all the windows of the library. He was concerned about the main building catching fire and burning up the books in the library. Dean (?) was burned in effigy during the spring. The Polar star in 1958-59 had five editors. They were publishing three times a week. Merritt served as editor twice. At the end of the year he was thrown out of school. The following year he returned to school and determined to graduate. The Patty Gym was finally built. Hess Hall was finally torn down. He talked about Hess Hall and its occupants. The powerhouse was torn down and the foundation was not destroyed. The 1960s was a time of great activity in the English Department. The Flying Poets flew around Alaska reading poetry. There was great literary activity in the English Department. Merritt said he was able to take advantage of it. The Geophysical Institute moved out of the Chapman Building and moved to the west ridge of campus. He finally graduated in 1966 and started working for the university. Merritt talked about the trailer court that the university ran at one time at the bottom of the hill. Merritt lived there at one time.

Unidentified person talked about the fire department on campus. He talked about a photo that had Wood's Hole on it. The current fire department now has a working agreement with the area around the university campus to provide fire protection. He introduces Joan Ostercamp who attended the university in the 1970s.

Joan Ostercamp talked about the roving bell. She was living in the faculty housing with her husband. Their vw beetle was once taken into a building and left there. She came up in 1968 as a faculty wife. She started a master's degree program after a few years. The 1970s was a time of changing. It was a fun time to be at the university. There were growing pains. The student population during the 1970s followed the boom and bust period. It doubled by the end of the decade. They were now the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. Anchorage and Juneau were established. The expansion was hard on the university presidents. There was quite a turnover. It was a productive time. She saw development in the MBA programs. The Petroleum Engineering and the research institutes grew. The library facilities saw great changes. The library facilities were located in the Bunnell Building and it is now have their own building. The physical plant has grown. She talked about other buildings and changes. The computer system started in the 1970. She has been a faculty wife, student and now a classified employee.

An unidentified per talked about getting signatures on campus as part of his job duties. He thanked Paul McCarthy for the use of the archives for the meeting.