

FLOYD AIKEN - Fairbanks

Taped in 1974. Interviewer is Mike Dalton.

Floyd Aiken, 70 years old in 1974, lives in the Fairbanks Pioneers Home. He has been suffering from Parkinson's disease for the past eight or more years.

He was known in Fairbanks for many, many years for his outstanding gardens and flower. He was one of very few men who entered the annual flower show in July. He took home many ribbons.

At the Fairbanks Pioneers home Floyd started many plants. He also revived many others that were pretty droopy. He's had trouble with other guests who want to pinch off shoots, pick flowers, etc. He has had a couple royal battles with one or two of the older matrons who live in the home...though he does not discuss these episodes on these tapes.

He entered the Pioneer home on April 6, 1973, his 69th birthday. He describes himself as a self-taught gardener. He sold his home on Woodlawn Street because of his health. Sold it to Him Hendrie in 1969.

Floyd went to Barrow in 1948, taking off in plane from Weeks Field which was the major Fairbanks airport at that time and which occupied land very near his home.

His first flower show entry was in 1960 or 1961 (couldn't remember exact year). The last show he entered was 1969. One year he had 13 exhibits and won seven blue ribbons plus the award of merit for his delphiniums. Delphiniums were his speciality. He planted some at the Pioneers Home six years ago. He says that for blooming plants one should use low nitrogen content fertilizer.

In 1967 (after flood) Floyd was hired to do the gardening at the Pioneer Home in Fairbanks, but he soon found that he was assigned to do too much inside maintenance work so he quit.

Floyd shows Mike many pictures and ribbons from flower shows, commenting on most of them.

He said that 45 to 50 years ago flower arrangers were all men. He worked as a gardener and laborer in Sousters Greenhouse in Illinois when he was young. In 1921 he had his picture in the Chicago Tribune. A roving photographer took his picture and asked him what he was going to do to celebrate July 4th. Floyd said he was mistakenly identified as a "florist" when in reality he was only helper.

Floyd Aiken was born in Aiken, Ill. April 6, 1904. There is no town there now. It used to be a small farming community. Town was named after his grandfather who farmed in that vicinity. His people came to the United States from Ireland in 1818, settling in Illinois after living a time in Indiana.

(more)

Aiken was living in Boulder City, Nev. in 1947 when he heard that Birch, Johnson, Lytle Construction (he'd worked for them before) were hiring men for Alaska jobs. He was hired and sent to Fairbanks. At that time Eielson Air Force Base was being built into a permanent base. During war it was just a strip and temporary buildings and was used for Russian trans-shipment of planes (from U.S. through Fairbanks to Nome and to Siberia). Aiken was a carpenter, a trade he followed most of his wrlking life.

He left Illinois in 1934. Had been a railroad brakeman and lost his job that year. Went to western Montana where he found work and stayed eight years. Then he went to Utah on a construction job. Then to Los Vegas...was there when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Hd gone to Las Vegas to help construct a magnesium plnat. Was drafted in the Army but discharged after six months because he was over age.