

Alaska Statehood Commission  
Oral History Project

Tillie (Janice) Reeve  
Claus-M. Naske  
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Anchorage

Tillie (Janice) Reeve came to Valdez in 1934. The next year she worked ten months in San Francisco and saved just enough money to buy a ticket back to Alaska. She married famed bush pilot Bob Reeve in 1936. They lived in Valdez for six years, then two years in Fairbanks, and then moved to Anchorage where she has lived ever since. They raised five children, all Alaska-born. When she came to Alaska, the only single women who came North were either nurses, teachers, or prostitutes. She did not have any training in any of these three professions. She did have a business college background.

She became involved in Republican politics in 1952 when her husband ran against Alaska's delegate to Congress, Bob Bartlett. And although he lost, he made a good showing. The Republican Party was very weak. In 1956 she ran for National Committee Woman and won. She helped to reorganize the Republican Party on a territory-wide basis.

She opposed statehood because she felt Alaska was not ready for added responsibilities. Most people were so busy building their businesses that they had no time getting involved in politics. In fact, most territorial legislators were people who never had to meet a payroll. Wally Hickel was the best governor Alaska had because he had a business sense. But he became governor after the damage had already been done. The legislature now had no idea how to budget or to determine priorities. It is like giving a bunch of children money.

The territory was unprepared for statehood. But the statehood act enabled Alaska to ease into statehood since it gave money and land. But it was like giving a kid a bunch of cash and telling him to go out and find a job--he is most unlikely to deal with it.

Tillie Reeve did not publicly oppose statehood since her party supported it. But once it came, she wanted it to work.

She is unclear on whether or not a bargain was struck between Congress and Alaska. ANCSA really fouled up the state land selection process.

She never felt like a second class citizen. As a matter of fact, Alaskans had vast freedoms to exercise personal choices and build businesses. She did not miss political privileges such as voting for president, for example. Going through customs in Seattle was a necessity because national security demanded

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it. The authorities picked up some 28 subversives. And although they paid federal taxes, Tillie feels they got much in return, such as roads and other necessities which the federal government paid for.

As a state "we are just another part of the while, sad business of federal government," a 49th part of it. We lost intangibles with statehood, such as being apart from the contiguous states. Oil would have been developed, and perhaps the federal government would have managed the money better than the state now does. She would not want to return to territorial status, because there are too many people who do not understand that you have to work hard to have it nice. Because of her age, she likes the amenities statehood has brought, but does not like the many people and the crime.

The territorial legislatures coped well, and the first state legislatures did well also, but in the last ten years the body has deteriorated. The job of chief executive was too big for Egan, Miller, and Hammond. The latter looks like a governor, but he is a country boy. Hickel was the best. People like Ed Dankworth and Joe Montgomery are retired from business, and they should be in the legislature. They represent Alaskan interests best. But not lawyers, too many intrigues and schemes.

In Valdez the Natives were very much a part of the community in territorial days. To her knowledge Natives were not discriminated against. She is unclear about the details of ANCSA, but has wondered about the settlement. Natives could vote, they were made U.S. citizens, so why did they not act like citizens? Equal opportunity as enforced discriminates against employers. But ANCSA will benefit all of Alaska.

This file is part of the Alaska Statehood Commission Oral History Project.

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