

H86-196

Lola Tilly

Tanana Yukon Historical Society

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Lola Tilly talked about being interviewed by Charles Bunnell in 1929. She did not apply to any positions but her dean talked her into going for an interview. She was teaching at the University of Minnesota at the time. He offered her a position as professor and head of home economics. It was intriguing but she told Dr. Bunnell that she could only stay for one year. Dr. Bunnell said that was all right and he left for the legislature in Juneau. The federal government supplied 50,000 with the land grant. About two weeks later he sent Lola Tilly a contract. She was told to bring along another teacher. She brought Eileen Sewell with her. It was a big decision but she liked challenges. Her one year extended for twenty-nine years. It took her two weeks to get to Alaska. She arrived August 24, 1929. At the College station the dormitory hostess accompanied them to the Nordale Hotel. A student picked them up for orientation. After that they took the railroad to the college and walked up the hill. Transportation by Griemann's bus came much later. They lived at the hotel and ate at the Model Café. Food prices were high. She talked about the food available at the time. Hal Bailey had a grocery store at Second and Cushman. He had a great sense of humor. They didn't have paper money at the time. Men sent baskets of fruit instead of flowers to women friends. Martin Pinska bought cakes to send to the teachers. Some of the teachers were Anna Beth Hanlon, Sylvia Pratt, Laura Lee Carr and Mary Benjamin Adler. Ann Robinson Wien and Beth Greene Walkwitz rented a cabin from Mrs. Hess. Mrs. Hess was later a member of the board of regents. She was the one that selected the site for the college.

There were four churches in the town at the time. She taught Sunday school at the Presbyterian church. The building was later moved to Alaska Land. There were no paved streets, no city water, no sewer system, no radio, no television and very few cars. There was some telephone service. The Empress Theater showed black and white silent films. Don Adler was the organist at the theater. There were many community activities. Ice skating was under the Cushman Street bridge. That was the same place that the dog races started. The ski trails and the warm up hut were located where the cemetery is located now. The newspaper published the passenger list of the weekly train. It was a social gathering every week. Eva McGown met the train.

Her work at the college involved long hours and a heavy schedule. Classes were small sometimes on a one to one basis. She had the chance to adapt courses on individual needs of students. There was one electric stove and mixer on DC current. The fire escape and window boxes were their freezer. Dr. Bunnell had a garden on the hill in front of the old main building. He supplied vegetables for her classes. He was very supportive of the home economics program and was interested in research. He supplied canned salmon for her classes to experiment with and they published original salmon recipes. They developed recipes for sourdough and high-bush cranberries. They did some original work on freezing food. They worked with local potatoes.

Otto Geist brought back Eskimo artifacts from diggings on St. Lawrence Island. She wrote several articles about Eskimo food habits, clothing, shelter and children's toys. They were published in a series in the National journal of home economics. They are now in the archives. The university offered short courses. The miner short course brought in

prospectors and miners. One man chose not to live in the dormitory. He lived in a cabin above the hill. The cook saved him leftovers. He stacked the frozen blocks of food around his cabin door.

One popular course was her camp cookery class. She explained how to make camp biscuits. She had a letter from one of her students. He took a class from her in 1932. It was an informal campus. It became the University of Alaska in 1935. Dr. Bunnell was a man of vision with high standards. He always created jobs for students that needed money. He kept the college open in spite of the budget cuts in the early 1930s. She taught at the University of Minnesota during the summer to supplement her income. Her first trip Outside was up the Yukon to Dawson. They stopped at all the villages. She took a narrow gauge train to Skagway and then a steamship to Vancouver. She returned through Valdez and took the stage along the Valdez trail. Her father gave her a 22 rifle and she was able to hunt grouse along the way.

She married Gray Tilly in 1937. Her husband had served in the Navy during WWI. Her husband came to Alaska in 1923. He worked on many jobs and arrived in Fairbanks by dog team. They built their own home. When her husband joined the military during WWII she started working for the Extension Service. The military took over the campus during the war. She started substitute teaching in the public school district. The home economics department was moved into the third floor in the old main building.

Eventually they moved into the third floor in the Eielson Building in 1950. They added a nursery school teaching lab on the same floor. The old president's residence was moved and remodeled and is known as the Bunnell House. It is the only original building left on campus.

She started substitute teaching in the public school district. It was an economic necessity. She served under the first four presidents at the university: Bunnell, Moore, Patty and Wood. Dr. Wood said she came with the land grant. She said it was exciting to be part of history in the making. She has had fifty-five years in Alaska.