Overview of the Collection

**Creator**  
Center for Pacific Northwest Studies

**Title**  
Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project Records

**Dates**  
2003-2005 (inclusive)

2003 2005

**Quantity**  
2 linear ft.

**Collection Number**  
XOE_CPNWS0044bcohp (collection)

**Summary**  
The Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project records document the personal responses to significant experiences and events by long-time residents of Bellingham as a part of the city's centennial celebration. Both the audio and video interviews of Bellingham residents represent an economic, ethnic, and physical cross section of the Bellingham community and covers a broad range of topics including local environmental issues, healthcare, entertainment, Native American issues and other ethnic and race relations, industry and businesses, transportation, and education.

**Repository**  
Western Washington University, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies  
Goltz-Murray Archives Building  
808 25th St.  
Bellingham, WA  
98225  
Telephone: 360-650-7534  
cpnws@wwu.edu

**Access Restrictions**  
Access restrictions apply to interviews with Pauline Hillaire and George Davenport.

**Languages**  
English.

**Sponsor**  
Funding for preparing this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Funding for encoding the finding aid was awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Historical Note

The Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project began in 2003 as a part of the Bellingham Centennial celebration from September 2003 to December 2004. In 2001, the Centennial Committee met and proposed an oral history project to preserve and promote awareness of Bellingham’s past. The goal of this city-funded project was to document long-time residents of Bellingham and their experiences of the past 100 years in Bellingham. Bellingham was celebrating the incorporation of the communities of Sehome, Fairhaven, and Whatcom. Center for Pacific Northwest Studies staff and volunteers conducted interviews with residents from a wide range of geographical, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Suggestions from the community helped locate: George Davenport, Lois and George Garlick, Pauline Hillaire, Lenny Hovde, Jim Roberts, Betty Russell, John and Nina Sternhagen.
Myrtle Molly “Jule” Thompson, Dr. Arthur Watts, Margaret Watts, Jane Hovde, Gordy Tweit, and Tut Asmundson. James V. Hillegas, a Western Washington University history student, conducted all the audio interviews, video interviews of George Davenport, Betty Russell, Pauline Hillaire, and Gordon Tweit as well as the research that accompanied the project as part of an independent study project. Working under the supervision of the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies Archivist, Elizabeth Joffrion, Hillegas completed 14 interviews with 11 individuals.

The Center for Pacific Northwest Studies (CPNWS) also collaborated with the City of Bellingham and Black Dog Productions of Bellingham to produce a documentary film, *Centennial Stories*, using portions of the video interviews. Along with the film, CPNWS also created a local history curriculum project for Bellingham schools. The explicit purpose of the audio interviews was to add to Bellingham’s documentary heritage, while the video interviews were created both to be retained at CPNWS and for use in the documentary film. These materials have been archived the Center in order to foster research in local Bellingham history for the years to come.

**Content Description**

The Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project Records include a series of interviews conducted with long-time Bellingham residents and sought to document Bellingham from its beginnings to the present day getting citizens to reflect on their personal experiences and observations of significant local events.

The records span 1 linear foot and contain three series: Audio Oral History Interviews, Video Oral History Interviews, and Documentary Film. The material spans from roughly November 2003 to April 2005 with the bulk of it spanning from November 2003 to September 15, 2004. There are 13 total interviewees and 16 total interviews (10 audio and 6 video). George Davenport, Pauline Hillaire, and Betty Russell provided both an audio and a separate video interview. Gordy Tweit, Jane Hovde, and Tut Asmundson did only video interviews. The sound quality of the interviews is good, except the audio interviews with Arthur Watts and George Garlick, which are hard to understand at times. There is also textual material in the form of transcripts, correspondence between the Mayor’s office and Elizabeth Joffrion, and consent forms of the interviewees. There are 7 transcripts of audio interviews with the exception of Gordon Tweit’s video interview transcript. The Center for Pacific Northwest Studies actively created this collection. The audio, video, as well as the textual materials, were incorporated into the collection at CPNWS as they were completed during the 2003-2004 period. The documentary film series contains the 47 minute documentary film, *Centennial Stories*. It utilized portions of the video interviews and was added to the collection later upon its completion on April 5, 2005.

The centennial oral history interviews document a cross section of the Bellingham community and individuals from a wide variety of different geographic, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. All interviewees were born between 1910 and 1929. Not all interviewees were born in Bellingham, but all eventually became long-time residents of the community. Among those interviewed are Pauline Hillaire, a Lummi elder; Lois Garlick, a local environmental activist; Betty Russell, one of the first women machinists at Boeing; and Gordon Tweit, the pharmacist of the Fairhaven Pharmacy. The topics covered in these interviews are just as diverse as those interviewed. Interviews deal with local environmental issues, healthcare, entertainment, Native American and other ethnic and race relations, industry and businesses, transportation, and education. While the focus is on Bellingham, local responses to national events such as the Great Depression, Japanese internment, and World War II are also represented in the interviews. Despite an emphasis on early Bellingham history, interviews also contain information about more recent Bellingham issues such as environmental issues and Interstate 5 construction.
Through the interviews, a researcher can gain an understanding of early Bellingham life and also provide insight into the changes that Bellingham has undergone over the years. Although not providing material on the area’s settlement, it does provide strong material covering Bellingham’s early days as a city in the 1920-1950s.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

Publication restrictions apply to interviews with George Davenport.

Preferred Citation


Administrative Information

Arrangement

The Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project Records are arranged in accordance with the following series arrangement:

Series 3. Documentary Film, 2005

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

Series 1: Audio Oral History Interviews, 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>Davenport, George interviewed by James Hillagas</td>
<td>2003 November 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcript of interview available.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The archives must receive written permission from the interviewee before</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>providing access to recording or transcript.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The researcher must receive written permission from the interviewee before</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>publication, quotation, or reproduction of all or part of the interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>George relates stories from childhood and early adulthood in the late</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1910s through the 1940s and growing up in South</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project Records, 2003-2005
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv00349
Bellingham. He describes the origins of the name “Happy Valley” as well as stories relating to the Happy Valley Terminal on the Bellingham Bay & British Columbia Railway. George recounts the many houses that he has lived in including one on Lummi Island. He also includes information on his father and mother and their backgrounds and birthplaces. His mother was English, who came by way of Canada. His father was born in Iowa and was part Pawnee. He briefly discusses Jewish and Slovenian acquaintances and relations between his German neighbors. He discusses the many jobs he has held including newspaper delivery boy for the Bellingham Herald, meat deliverer for Star Market, and an ambulance driver. He reminisces about positions held at Brown and Cole’s Market and the Bellingham Shipyards. Mr. Davenport discusses labor and the jobs that he held during World War II including a truck driver. He was also a bus driver for Don Satterlee, who was the mayor of Bellingham at the time.

1/2

**Garlick, Lois and George** interviewed by James V. Hillagas

2 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)

Transcript of interview available.

Lois (b. 1920) and George (1911-2005) discuss how they met at Western Washington University, employed as science technicians, Lois in Science Education and George in Biology. In addition to discussing their respective parents, George also relates his experience of being drafted and stationed first in England and then in France and Germany during World War II. Lois recounts how she got involved as an activist in local environmental issues and politics in the Bellingham area and throughout Whatcom County. She has been a member of numerous organizations including the Audubon Society of the North Cascades, Clean Water Alliance, People for Lake Whatcom, Lake Whatcom Watershed Forestry Forum, Watershed Defense Club as well as the League of Women Voters. She has also been a member of several local boards and committees including ones on the Shoreline, Ten-Mile Creek, Silver Creek, Connelly Creek, and the Columbia Neighborhood. She was involved in county government serving on the planning commission, only to have the County Executive later dismiss her. She also mentions events pertaining to the Bellingham waterfront and Georgia Pacific as well as other companies such as Intalco.

1/3

**Hillaire, Pauline** interviewed by James V. Hillagas

2 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)

Transcript of interview available.

The archives must receive written permission from the interviewee before providing access to recording or transcript.
Pauline, a Lummi tribal elder, recalls her childhood and growing up on Hillaire Road [now Lake Terrell Road] on the Lummi Indian Reservation. Pauline points out that she has two different birthdates: the tribal archives census rolls recording the year 1929 and her birth certificate recording the year 1931. She reminisces about moving to La Conner in 1939 and living on a farm there. She discusses attending the Lummi Day School then Ferndale High School. Pauline and her siblings were some of the first Native Americans to attend that high school and she describes the experiences that accompany it. She recounts her parents serving as missionaries to Native Americans throughout Washington State as well as the various missionaries that would visit the reservation. Pauline’s mother attended the Tulalip School and she recalls some of her mother’s experiences. She went to the Haskell Institute, an Indian Boarding School, in Lawrence Kansas. She received the Governor’s Heritage Award for her efforts in preserving the Lummi language and song.

1/4

**Hovde, Lenny** interviewed by James V. Hillagas

2 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)

Transcript of interview available.

Lenny (b. 1927) discusses many aspects of Bellingham life including her childhood growing up on Victor Avenue. Her parents were both English and came first to Discovery Bay. After spending years apart due to war, they eventually settled in Bellingham. She briefly mentions her parents before moving on to school activities that she participated in at the Roeder School, Whatcom Middle School, and Bellingham High School. She was in school during both the Great Depression and during the start of World War II and shares some personal experiences about those periods. She also mentions recreational sports such as downhill skiing on Mount Baker and water skiing on Lake Padden and Lake Whatcom. Lenny further mentions other water destinations such as Squalicum Beach, Birch Bay, Chuckanut Bay, Larrabee State Park, Citizen’s Dock, and Agate Bay. She remembers working at Mrs. Hunt’s Grocery when she was 9 years old. When she was 16 years old, she worked in the kitchen at the Madrona Inn on Orcas Island during the summer. Another focus of Lenny’s is entertainment in Bellingham. She mentions the various theaters including the Mount Baker Theater, the American Theater, the Grand Theater, and the People’s Theater. She also discusses some activities at the YMCA as well as the Red Wing Social Club. Recollecting changes in Bellingham, she talks about aspects that deal with building of Interstate 5, the destruction of old buildings, and overall changes in the Silver Beach Neighborhood.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1/5 | **Roberts, Jim** interviewed by James V. Hillagas  
3 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)  
Jim (b. 1927) discusses life in Bellingham growing up on the waterfront on C. Street. He also recounts his father, who worked as a section foreman on the Great Northern Railroad, and growing up in a section house provided by the company. He discusses many topics including the Great Depression, transportation, a labor strike, businesses and restaurants of downtown Bellingham, the pollution of Bellingham Bay and Whatcom Creek, prostitution and brothels, ethnic relations including the Ku Klux Klan presence and Japanese internment. Jim, who served in the Navy during World War II, also mentions life at home as well as overseas during the war. He further speaks about education ranging from his undergraduate and graduate years at Western Washington College to his experiences teaching science in public schools and later serving as the school district superintendent. He finally relates projects benefiting healthcare that he undertook while working with the St. Luke’s Foundation after retiring. | 2004 February 27 |
| 1/6 | **Russell, Betty** interviewed by James V. Hillagas[view]  
2 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)  
Transcript of interview available.  
Betty (b. 1924) discusses her childhood in Bellingham living in both Park Street and Smith Road houses. She focuses mainly on traditions particular to her immediate family such as Christmas, religion, and weekend activities. One of her occasional getaways was going with the family to a beach on the Lummi Indian Reservation. She mentions her relationship and experiences with her father who was a logger and later a longshoreman. In addressing the Longshore Labor Strike in the 1930s, she illustrates the reaction of the community and its direct effect on her family. Betty reminisces about first being an independent seamstress at 14 years old, volunteering as a receptionist at Graham Airport, and attending the old Sehome School to learn to be a sheet metal mechanic. Later she worked at Boeing in Seattle becoming one of the first women workers on the floor of the Boeing plant as a mechanic mostly building B-17’s. She also recounts both her family’s and the community’s reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and further discusses serving in the hydrographic office of the Navy in Washington D. C. Here, she remarks about differences between the East Coast and West Coast. | 2003 November 20 |
| 2/1 | **Sternhagen, Nina and John** interviewed by James V. Hillagas  
3 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)  
John (b. 1917) came to Bellingham from Montana when he was 3 years old. His family was of Austrian and Bohemian descent. | 2004 March 9 |
He discusses growing up on Yew Street as well as moving to a farm 4 miles out of town on the Mount Baker Highway. He recalls his family’s grocery store, Sternhagen’s Grocery, on Orleans Street as well as others throughout Bellingham. He also relates his experiences serving in the Coast Guard Reserve during World War II on a tug boat in Alaska and Washington as well as a patrol boat in Bellingham Bay. Nina (b. 1914) was born in Italy and came to Bellingham when she was 5 years old. She discusses growing up in Bellingham and her family’s adaptation to American life and schools. She mentions the various church organizations that she was a member of including the Catholic Daughters. Nina also briefly recounts the jobs that she has held in the past. The both explore various aspects of Bellingham life including industry, downtown businesses, markets, the circus, transportation, education, working at Western Washington College, the Bellingham Herald, Interstate 5 construction, and overall changes in the Bellingham area.

2/2
Thompson, Myrtle Molly interviewed by James V. Hillagas
3 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)
Transcript of interview available.
Myrtle (b. 1920) discusses her childhood on Baker Street in the North Side of Bellingham and has a predominantly family and home life focus. She reminisces about prayer meetings among fellow Scandinavian families and the many traditions that accompany these meetings including food, table settings, and manners. Her father was Danish and came to Bellingham via Iowa, while her mother came via Minnesota and descended from a Swedish family. Her father worked at Bellingham Sash & Door Company, but she remarks of his fondness for botany, for which he had a degree in. She recalls the apple orchards that he planted in their yard and his willingness to share his knowledge of plants and trees as well as his harvest with others. Mrs. Thompson discusses her family life during the Great Depression as well as many other aspects of her home life including numerous chores, activities, games, clothing, trips, and neighbor relations. She also mentions her school experiences from the Columbia School, Roeder School, and finally Whatcom High School.

2/3
Watts, Dr. Arthur interviewed by James V. Hillagas
2 audiocassettes (60 minutes each)
Arthur (b. 1916) was born in Bellingham, but both his parents were originally from Iowa. He discusses many aspects of his childhood growing up on Cornwall Avenue and of the changes that have occurred in Bellingham over the years. His father owned his own real estate business where Arthur worked for a
year after graduating from high school. He became a medical practitioner after serving in World War II so his focus is largely on community health care and he highlights the emergence of specialists and the lack of competition among hospitals today. He relates changes that have taken place in Bellingham parks as well as yards in the Happy Valley and Birchwood neighborhoods. He also discusses forms of transportation like streetcars, bicycles, trains, boats, and horses as well as the condition of roads such as Guide Meridian and Holly Street throughout the years. He briefly mentions stories of bootleggers in Bellingham before and after prohibition, his family’s relationship to Ella Higginson, entertainment such as orchestras and operas, door-to-door food salesmen, and Western Washington College’s relationship to the larger Bellingham community.

Margaret was born in Bellingham and grew up on North Garden Street. Her grandfather was Robert Morse, one of the first settlers of Bellingham. He owned a hardware store that her father Cecil inherited. Margaret remarks about going there as a child and eventually worked there for 3 summers as her father’s secretary. She discusses the physical as well as attitude changes that have occurred in Bellingham. She also compares the role that hardware stores play today with when she was growing up. She reminisces about family vacations to Orcas Island where they had a summerhouse and would stay from July to the end of August. She started at Western Washington College before transferring to Stanford University and went on to complete her undergraduate, masters, and her teaching credentials there. Upon returning to Bellingham, she taught at the Whatcom Junior High School and at Bellingham High School for a total of eight years. She recalls teaching during World War II and acting as a counselor to many students whose parents were contributing to the war effort. She also reflects on the attack on Pearl Harbor and the other effects that the war had on Bellingham like blackouts and the National Guard presence. She recalls downtown entertainment including theatres like the Egyptian Theatre, the American Theatre, the Grand Theatre, and the People’s Theatre as well as special events like the circus and evangelical tent revivals. She also recalls downtown businesses and business owners.

Series 2: Video Oral History Interviews, 2003-2004

Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project Records, 2003-2005
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv00349
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2/5         | **Tut Asmundson** interviewed by Susan Blais  
3 digital videocassettes  
VHS tape duplicate also available.  
Tut was born in Mitchell, North Dakota and came from an Icelandic family. He attended law school at the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. He relates stories from his early years in North Dakota during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression before and after the rest of his family had moved to the state of Washington. He joined his family in Washington in 1931 arriving first in Blaine and then eventually settling in Bellingham. He discusses his position he held at the Washington State Social Security Department for 8 years traveling throughout the state handling claims. After failing the Washington state bar exam numerous times, he passed. His focus is on the Port Commission, which he served for numerous years. He discusses various aspects of the shipping industry including interactions with Georgia Pacific, Bellingham Cold Storage, the Bellingham Airport, and Intalco. He expresses the changes that he and his fellow commissioners enacted to existing local industry and the promotion of Bellingham helping to foster the interest of outside industries. Tut also relates how he got his nickname, how he met his wife Esther, population changes, prostitution, and race relations. | 2004 June 10 |
| 3/1         | **Davenport, George** interviewed by James V. Hillagas  
2 digital videocassettes  
VHS tape duplicate also available.  
The archives must receive written permission from the interviewee before providing access to recording or transcript. The researcher must receive written permission from the interviewee before publication, quotation, or reproduction of all or part of the interview.  
George expands on his audio interview by discussing various modes of transportation including horse and carriage, cars, streetcars, boats, trains, and buses. He also expands on remarks about the waterfront discussing the changes that have occurred with new plants moving in and out. He remarks on some of the previous uses of Lake Padden as well as Lake Whatcom. He also relates some of the same anecdotes that he told in the earlier audio interview. | 2003 November |
| 3/2         | **Hillaire, Pauline** interviewed by James V. Hillagas  
1 digital videocassette  
VHS tape duplicate also available. | 2003 December 17 |
The archives must receive written permission from the interviewee before providing access to recording or transcript. In her video interview, Pauline focuses on treatment of Native Americans by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She expands on previous remarks about government-issued clothes and how they compared to homemade clothes, government clinics, and government-issued food. She contrasts this with the types of food that her parents cooked and grew as well as some of the medicinal herbs. She also discusses traditional Indian education including lessons in songs, legends, fishing, longhouse building, tanning, and medicine from experts in each field. Pauline contrasts this to the education she received at the Lummi Day School.

3/3  
**Hovde, Jane** interviewed by Elizabeth Joffrion  
3 digital videocassettes  
VHS tape duplicate also available.  
Jane (b. 1921) reflects on her unusual birth on a tugboat and growing up in the San Juan Islands. Her focus in this interview is her career as an artist, and the art scene in Bellingham and the Northwest in general. She reflects on her long career as an artist that began during childhood and spans to the present. Jane expresses different aspects of her art including inspiration, style, and influences. She also discusses artists of the Northwest School including Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, and Guy Anderson. She also mentions past and present members of the Bellingham art community such as Suzy Barrow, Harold Wahl, and Louis Meyer as well as art professors from the Western Washington College of Education. She discusses the changes that have occurred in art in Bellingham as well as art in general. She also discusses other changes in the Bellingham community in general and hits on topics such as travel, downtown businesses, Bellingham’s relationship to Western and ethnic and race relations. Her husband, A. J. Hovde, served in the service during World War II for 3 years and she reflects on her time spent while he was away. A. J. was an English professor at Western and Fairhaven college and Jane notes some of her experiences as a member of the Faculty Wives.

3/4  
**Russell, Betty** interviewed by James V. Hillagas  
2 digital videocassettes  
VHS tape duplicate also available.  
Betty expands on her audio interview by discussing the waterfront and her father’s role as a longshoreman. She also expands on being the first woman sheet metal worker for Boeing as well as serving in the Navy during World War II. She discusses prostitution in Bellingham and relates a story.
coming into contact with prostitutes first hand at the doctor’s office where she worked. Betty also reminisces about details of her home life from meals and clothing to spending time on Squalicum Beach with her father.

4/1  
**Tweet, Gordy** interviewed by James V. Hillagas  
2 digital videocassettes  
Transcript and VHS tape duplicate also available.  
Gordy (b. 1926) discusses growing up in Happy Valley and his family’s extensive involvement in the Pacific American Fishery. His mother was their bookkeeper, his father a warehouseman, his great-grandfather worked in the shipyard, his great-aunt was a secretary. He relates his family’s Norwegian and Swedish ethnic background and their traditions including lutefisk dinners. He briefly mentions other local ethnicities including Chinese, Japanese, English, and Scottish families living in Fairhaven and Bellingham. His focus is primarily on Fairhaven and he speaks of Fairhaven businesses, the Yugoslavian and Croatian fishermen living in the south side, and festivals including Indian Day, Well Blossom Time, and the Tulip Festival. He recalls his education at Larrabee Grade School, Fairhaven Junior High School, and Bellingham High School. Gordon started out as a delivery boy for the Fairhaven Pharmacy in 1941 and entered the Navy in 1944 serving on a tanker in the Aleutians Islands. He returned two years later and decided to become a pharmacist. He also discusses the atmosphere and changes in Bellingham during and after World War II. As a pharmacist, he further explores the changes in community health care and services provided by the pharmacy. He relates the overall changes that took place in Bellingham, Happy Valley, and Fairhaven, as well.

### Series 3: Documentary Film, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/2</td>
<td><em>Centennial Stories</em> by Black Dog Productions in collaboration with the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Names and Subjects

**Subject Terms:**  
Depressions -- 1929 -- Washington (State) -- Bellingham