

## CECILY McNEIL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

September 16, 2011

Cecily was interviewed by Annemarie Harrod and Karen McDonough.

Annemarie: My name is Annemarie Harrod, and today is Friday, September 16, 2011. Karen Sue Maas McDonough and I are interviewing Cecily Rideout McNeil for the first time as part of the North Fork History Project. This interview and oral history project are sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association in Polebridge, Montana, located along the North Fork of the Flathead River in northwestern Montana. Our interview is taking place at Cecily and her husband Edward “Mac’s” home at 2969 Rufenach Circle in Kalispell, Montana.

To begin, would you tell us when and where you were born and also something about your early background before coming to the North Fork?

Cecily: I was born in San Francisco, California in December of 1923. My early background was to live in Marin County, California, a very beautiful place. I lived there until I was about 20, at which point I moved to the Midwest.

Annemarie: When did you come to the North Fork of the Flathead for the first time and how did you get there?

Cecily: Well, we were living in Chicago. I had two young children about age 7 and 10, something like that, and I was very anxious to get them out of Chicago for the summer. I got a second-hand Volkswagen bus and planned to take it up and camp near my sister in northern Michigan. However, a man ran into me at an intersection. He had no insurance. He had no sense. He had nothing. Fortunately, I wasn’t hurt, but I couldn’t use the bus for a while. I went to work, and during that time I felt quite anxious about getting away. I ran across an ad from Charlie Greene, who lived in Coram. He was a real estate agent, and he said he had gorgeous places for sale within the boundaries of Glacier National Park. I wrote to him and sent him \$100 in earnest money on the place that he sent me a picture of. It had a big tall tree in front of it. It was a lovely log cabin; how great.

I went out there, and to make a long story short, I met him in Apgar and he drove me 14 miles on this two-track dirt road to the middle of nowhere, which was Dutch Creek within the Park. We drove past a lovely cabin, and it looked oh so nice. He drove on down into this hollow to Joe Opalka’s cabin, which was the one for sale. The tree that had been so beautiful was dead. I went into the cabin and ran my hand along the wall, and this red dust came off in my hand. Charlie Greene said, “Oh that’s perfectly normal,” and I said, “Well, no it’s not.” I said, “What about that cabin we passed that had a for sale sign on it?” He says, “Oh, I don’t know.” I said, “Yes, I want to look at that,” and I bought it on the spot.

I remember—long story short again—I thought I was being very sophisticated. I was then in my 30s, and I said, “I have a lawyer here in town.” I had gotten one with a friend. I gave Charlie Greene the lawyer’s name, and he said, “Oh yes, that’s my cousin.” Oh my. Anyway, I bought

the place right then and there. I was particularly anxious to get out of the city. My husband let me do this. He was very tolerant, but I was the one that really wanted to get out.

Annemarie: So getting out into a wild environment, was that a deliberate choice or was there something in your background that brought you to that?

Cecily: Yes, there was. I had not known my father except by the objects that he left behind—he died when I was 3½—and by his writing. He was a novelist, and his bookplate had a small engraving, that was part of him to me. I would look at that whenever I opened a book and there it was. It was a spruce tree under a cold winter sky, with a legend from I think the 95<sup>th</sup> Psalm, and that was him to me. I don't think I was consciously seeking for that, but the thought of a northern country and beautiful trees is something that I needed. And he was similar to me. I have a poem that he wrote when he was in New York City, and it's very much what I would feel if I were under those circumstances. We were similar and I didn't know it.

Annemarie: He was born in Maine?

Cecily: Yes.

Annemarie: And then from Maine?

Cecily: A branch of his family had gone out to the central valley of California and were in a banking business there. My father went and stayed with them. He was in California and met my mother there. That's how they met.

Annemarie: So, when you came to the North Fork what was the social life like? How was it different from the other places, California where you were raised?

Cecily: What was the North Fork like 60 years ago? There were no 20-room mansions built by people we never saw. People knew each other. There were hermits like Tom Reynolds, and there were alienated people. I won't name names, but by and large we socialized, the whole community, as you remember very well. Saturday nights, and then there was church on Sundays. That was a North Fork tradition.

Annemarie: Tell me more about the church activity.

Cecily: I didn't go, so I can't tell you. [Laughs] Not that I'm not religious, but I just didn't go. But it was there, and they had the pulpit and the cross and all those things, so it was nice.

Annemarie: Did the minister come to the North Fork?

Cecily: Yes, I think they recruited someone. I did go once or twice. There was an Episcopal minister who came up once from St. Mathew's in Kalispell. Anyway, yes, there was some contact there, and it was a nice service. People went to trouble. I gave you something that I wrote up about a church service that was held on a Sunday evening by the "Fellowship of a Hungry Horse." I think you might want to use that.

Annemarie: For the people who would be listening who don't know the North Fork, can you talk just a little bit about that?

Cecily: Our mailman was a man named Fred Boss, a very nice and very good mailman and quite religious. He belonged to a group called, I guess, the Fellowship of a Hungry Horse. I think the building is still there in Hungry Horse. They wanted to do a nice thing for us, and they were going to have a church service on a Sunday night. My kids were then 19 or so. Here came all these very pleasant women in their polyester suits, with all kinds of cakes, and oh goodness me. They hung up a quilt that they had brought over the western window, and the sun was showing through it. It was like a stain-glassed window. It was really very nice. Well, the candle had a mouse nest in it, and nobody could do anything with it. The generator went bad, and they couldn't show the movie they brought called "The Valley of the Shadow of Death," a real loser. They tried to convert various people who were not having any of being converted. But it was a well-meant gesture. That was a one-time thing, though.

Annemarie: And you mentioned the mailman. What is your experience of the mail being delivered up the North Fork and the mail carriers?

Cecily: The mail was delivered twice a week—it still is. You had to get out to your box by the road in the morning. I think the mail person would bring your mail in the morning and then pick up the outgoing mail on the way back down, so you could answer things in a hurry and have them picked up on the way back down the line. After Fred Boss left, there was another mailman, whose name escapes me now [Ben Ringo], who was very particular about the exact distances and orientations of mailboxes. He irritated some of the most common tranquil people in the North Fork with the things that he required. It was alright to me. And there was a group that came in recently, substitute mail people, and they gave the most marvelous listing of the problems they'd had with mailboxes, trying to find them and how some were located in bushes, and they went on and on about it. I wish someone had recorded that, because it was very funny. But by and large, I really admired the mail people. They were good.

Annemarie: Apart from the mail, did they deliver other things for you?

Cecily: Packages, I think.

Annemarie: Did they run errands like prescriptions?

Cecily: For other people they did. They didn't have to do it for us, but they did for some people. I think for Tom Reynolds it was really quite important. I don't know a great deal about that, but I believe that Becky Green, who was then the mail person, really helped him, and she was with him, I think, at the end. That's what I've been told. That's a remarkable thing.

Annemarie: He died in her arms.

Cecily: Yes.

Annemarie: He waited for her.

Cecily: Oh, my God.

Annemarie: And then he died.

Cecily: Special.

Annemarie: What about old-timers and homesteaders you knew? Can you talk about some of the people who are no longer with us?

Cecily: I have notes. You hear me rattling paper. If I'm sort of sounding like I'm reading, I'm reading. Residents who made an impression. Well, there were the summer people and the year-round people. By and large, with certain exceptions, the year-round residents impressed me most. They were by and large friendly, receptive, and interesting, self-sufficient, versatile, and generous. The Holcolms, though I didn't know them very well. The Wurtz's. Ms. Mathison, who was our immediate neighbor. Ruth and Loyd Sondreson weren't homesteaders, but they were very helpful and generous people and they never soured. Even when there was hostility one time against them they didn't sour against people, they didn't gossip. I thought they were wonderfully wise. Other neighbors of ours were Frank and Ethel Newton, whom I didn't really know very well but I admired very much. Frank Newton helped me once when we rented a horse. He came in and looked at it and said, "You have that horse taken care of." Some man rented it with a cut in its fetlock. He was a wonderful guy. He was closer to Rachael and Harold Sweet than he was to us, but they were great neighbors.

Annemarie: Did you know Ralph Thayer also?

Cecily: Slightly. I didn't know him well, but I had some contacts with him. We needed to find out about a road that was on the north edge of our land, and we went to visit him when he was already in the nursing home. We saw him at gatherings. He was always very pleasant, very nice to people, but again I didn't really know him well.

Annemarie: But he was one of the original homesteaders. What about the Foremans? You knew Helen Foreman, although she was not a homesteader.

Cecily: One summer my husband was going to be teaching in the east and he brought us out to the cabin and got us all established. I'd written ahead to the Hammers [Walt and Hazel] and said, "I just don't want to spend another summer alone. Can I rent a cabin from you?" Although I had a cabin of my own, I just couldn't take it.

Annemarie: This was?

Cecily: I don't know what year it was. Walt and Hazel Hammer were friends with the Foremans. Helen Foreman used to bring the Sunday *New York Times* down to them every week after she read it, and that was how I met her. And then knowing her I met Orville and the rest of the family and became very good friends, and that has a lot to do with the beginning of the North Fork Compact, as a matter of fact.

Annemarie: Would you like to tell us about the Compact?

Cecily: When we get to question 7, somewhere in there, soon.

Annemarie: What about Grandma Mathison [Irene]?

Cecily: Yes. The first time I ever saw Grandma Mathison we were hammering away on the cabin or doing something, whatever crazy thing we were doing. Usually water systems occupied a lot of your time, as you well know. Somebody in a pretty dimity sort of a calico dress was coming

through the woods, as if she knew exactly where she was going. In fact, her family had built that trail. It was Grandma Mathison, and we became very good friends, a very hospitable woman, religious, tolerant of me and my ignorance of the country. Her daughter was still alive, and her daughter had some children, so our kids played together. I sort of associate the Mathisons with something that happened having to do with a bear, but maybe you would rather wait until question 17 for that one.

Annemarie: You don't have to.

Cecily: Okay. My husband had just left. This was another summer that he was going to be teaching, at Harvard, and he got us all set up in the Moose Creek cabin. That very night the kids came to me when I was sitting in the biffy and said, "Mom, there's a bear!" And here in the carefully arranged bottles that my husband had sunk in the stream as to refrigerate there was a bear getting at things, pulled it up and opened it up. You know how clever they are. So, I had a gun that somebody lent me. [Moe Duvall] had lent me a gun. It was a 30-ought 6, a very good gun. I didn't know how to use it. I thought, "Okay I'm going to get that bear." I wasn't afraid of anything. I was too dumb to be afraid. I stacked up a garbage can and some stuff on top that would make a lot of noise in the middle night. In the middle of the night I heard clankety clank clank. I couldn't see much. I turned on my flashlight. I got out the gun and I shot at the bear. Well, it was discovered later that I had shot the garbage can. Many years later they found the garbage can; the bear carried it off and made five holes in the screen. And people would dine out on that story, or at least they used to, the silly woman from Chicago and what she tried to do.

Well, the bear itself turned up at the Mathisons the next day. We were over having lunch with the kids and Grandma Mathison. Alan can tell you that story. Are you going to interview Alan?

Annemarie: I would like to hear it from you.

Cecily: He tells it better than I do, because he lived through it, really. Grandma and I and Grandma's daughter were in the Mathison cabin, and they were cooking. The kids, Alan and Bruce and their Mathison friends, were all out playing in the mini barn and outside areas that they had there. They saw the bear and came rushing back to the house. "There's a bear" and we looked out. We didn't see anything, and we thought they were kidding. They were kidding that first time, and they were kidding the second time they did that, and the third time they were not kidding. It was a case of crying wolf. By that time we had locked the door, so there was a great deal of carrying on. Eventually they came in and we went into the kitchen and looked out, and yes there was a bear getting into their spring and their food and so forth. I don't remember what we did. I think we got a Fish & Game person to come and shoo the bear off somehow. It took a little while, but that was the great bear story that people for many years told on me, that first part.

Annemarie: Did you know Marie Price Peterson?

Cecily: Only to say hello, and I've read her book [*Homestead Memories*]. She was a great friend of the Hammers, so I knew her, and the Hammers were also great friends with Tom Reynolds. That was the way you made friends. You knew someone like the Edwards, and then the Edwards introduced us to the Maases and then the Maases introduced us to Frank Evans, and then you met other people and you went to the dances and pretty soon you knew a lot of people. It was very nice. Apgar was not like that, believe me. It's entirely different.

Annemarie: Apgar was where?

Cecily: That's at the foot of the Lake McDonald.

Annemarie: You lived how far from Apgar?

Cecily: 14 miles.

Annemarie: When you were living in the park?

Cecily: Yes.

Annemarie: Did you participate in Apgar life?

Cecily: No. We would shop there, and there was no handle on it. They had their own world and it's a different kind of world.

Annemarie: Is it a different kind of social class?

Cecily: I wonder. I think so. I think some of the people were famous. I think some of them had a lot of money. Lakeside homes, established. It was very different than the North Fork.

Annemarie: How would you describe the social class of the people in North Fork at that time?

Cecily: Well, it was interesting because we had the summer people, many of whom had vacations. They had time to get away. They were teachers. They may not have had much money, but they had enough to afford a cabin or the rental on the cabin or whatever. Some of them worked. The first people we met were Burt and Thelma Edwards. Burt was a ranger at Logging Creek in the Park, on the inside truck road, and then we met his family.

But social class, that's what I don't like to see now. I don't like to see the isolation of some of the people who have bought land there. For example, I have neighbors that are really, I think, quite nice people. He's the grandson of J.P. Morgan. I met his mother, and she was very pleasant, but it was...I recognized it because I've seen it in other places. It was graciousness and lady-likeness, but you never see them again. I heard from Don Sullivan about a place with I don't know how much square footage, where they keep the generator on all the time just to keep the water from freezing in the toilets or something. The man only uses it for a month a year, if that. That's sad, but of course they're perfectly entitled to do that, but there are always some who come just for the weekend. You might meet them and you might not, and they were very often people from Columbia Falls and the valley, and it wasn't the same as the summer people. They were pleasant. They were helpful. But the people that I remember as the two social groups—and it's hard to call them classes—were the homesteaders, the people who lived there all year whom I admired, by and large, and the summer people, many of whom were teachers.

Annemarie: Is that similar to now the year-rounders versus the summer people here?

Cecily: I think it's different now. Year-rounders are probably facing some of the same challenges. They're coping with more. They're having more technology, I think, to help them to cope with things. I feel it's different in that way. I don't know any of them very well. I feel it has

changed, but I feel the basic spirit of openness and friendliness is still there, and I think your generation, Beverly and yours, too, are trying to promote that by doing more at the hall and having more gatherings and things like that. It's an effort to bring back something of what we once had. It seems like it. I'm not up there so much, so I can't speak of that too well.

Annemarie: That's a real possibility, because this year for the first time people were complaining that there's too much social life and that we needed to cut back because we were working too hard with all the projects we have going.

Cecily: Ask them what they really think is important, I guess, but I think to have something every Saturday night is important. It made me very sad to see the hall with nothing going on on Saturday night. I think all we needed was the records and a few people and it was fun. We brought some mixed cake or whatever. Karen, do you remember the cake that Helen Huck Ramon brought to a 4<sup>th</sup> of July party?

Karen: I don't recall it, but maybe if you would jog my memory.

Cecily: It was decorated with the colors of our nation and maybe some others besides, and it had pinecones all picked out on it and it was really something. I mean it was fun. People were fun. They were different and individual and we had the hat dance, so many things that were... Different people specialized in managing those things. Ann Hensen was the wife of a son of a homesteader. She ran the hat dance. She planned for it and bought the prizes and it was wonderful. She lived in California. It was wonderful for the children. I don't know if I got around to saying it. You were asking me about social life on the North Fork. The chance to meet, to know several generations of one family was absolutely vital to my family. We lived in the heart of Chicago where Barack Obama now lives. Nothing against him, don't get me wrong, but you can't exactly say it was friendly. It was a University of Chicago neighborhood. The people were not interested in getting to know you. They would say, "Does your husband work for the University?" Oh yes, the University of Illinois. It was really difficult for me. There again, I crossed trails with my father, who said he didn't like living in Marin County, which was sort of a bedroom community of wealthy people. He went back to Maine, and he said, "It's wonderful for my children to see a community where people know each other." That is what I got here, and it's more important to me than the scenery, by far.

Annemarie: We missed when you moved from Dutch Creek to the west side.

Cecily: Yes, that was interesting. Burt Edwards was directly involved with that. We loved Dutch Creek, but we were a little bit lonely. You know we went out through Apgar, and Apgar was not at all interesting, as I say. We got to know the Edwards family because I went up to camp at Logging Creek with the children or something, and they were so kind and so hospitable. I remember one night when the kids and I and Thelma and Burt were all in the cab of his truck, and we went up to look at the Cummings Ranch, which was up just east of Logging and up toward Quartz, a terrible road, of course. We were coming down, and Burt said to me, "Cecily you must get land on the North Fork before it goes sky high. Amen. I got busy on it that very year. I got our old Nash and went off with it with the two children. In those days you had back down to Apgar and all the way around Columbia Falls to get on the North Fork Road. We wrote down each place we thought looked interesting. We came down toward where the Newton's driveway is now, the Schnaus place and everything. It was just a beautiful view that opened up

for us the first time, and I wrote it all down, the coordinates and everything. I had a geological map with me. Later I was talking to Thelma, and she said, "Stonestreet has a place to sell there." Stonestreets had [the Wilderness] Cabins, near Ben Rover's cabin and later the Wilhelms' place.

We bought from the Stonestreets [John and Trudy]. Stoney drove us in on a snowy day. It was just beginning to snow. It was September, and we pulled off on that road. He said, "This ain't no bully hard." He had an old Studebaker. Up we went, and we parked by the old cabin. I didn't even look at it. It just looked derelict to me. We walked over. I think we'd been on the land five minutes, if that. We walked over to the stream, and here was a spring. I said, "Sold!" Everybody thought I was insane to pay \$4,000 for 100 acres of land. Duh!! [Laughs]

Annemarie: What year was that?

Cecily: We signed the deed in 1959. We were going to dances at McFarland's already, and we knew quite a few people, and we started going to the hall, joined the Improvement Association, and so on.

Annemarie: Were there any rangers that you knew that you can tell us about?

Cecily: Not very well, but we knew Adolf Opalka. When we were in the Park we were in his district, and oh he was fun. I liked him. His brother had a cabin further down, and another brother of his had a cabin next to that between the two. Leopold Opalka and Joe Opalka, who had the cabin I thought of buying at one time. Adolf would come down in his green car that they had. He said, "Well, now if you're having trouble with bears," and we had trouble with bears in Dutch Creek because that's where they dumped the bum bears from Apgar. You would see a bear with a rump with a red splotch on it, and you knew it was bad news. At the time, Adolf said, "You keep a .22 here, and you just swang the thing in the butt to get it out of here," and we did. [Laughs] At the time we had a dog that I think thought the bears were really quite cute and was interested in them. We didn't know that. We put a standard French Poodle outside to chase the bears. It would go over and water the poppies instead, which he wasn't supposed to do, and he was very friendly with the bear. Oh no, it didn't help at all. But I remember shooting at a bear. I guess I hit it, because it went and sat in the cold water for a minute to cool its rump off, then off it went. But I like bears, so I don't like to shoot at them. We didn't kill anything, and I don't think we caused anything to die a lingering death, but it was nerve-racking. You never knew when they were going to be around.

Annemarie: If you had had bear spray at that time would you have used it instead?

Cecily: I would have carried it. I certainly would have carried it. I mean, every time you went out to the bathroom biffy you had to think. We've been marooned by various animals in the biffy, but never a bear.

Annemarie: How far did you have to walk from your cabin to the biffy?

Cecily: Oh, not terribly far. 300 feet, not bad. By the way, our generator at that cabin had been Charlie Russell's generator. You know, he had a cabin by the lake and [Bob?] Duvall had acquired, so we still have Charlie Russell's generator.

Annemarie: Tell us about who Charlie Russell was.



Cecily: He was a western painter. He painted cowboys and Indians, an interesting man. I don't know if you know it, but he did an artwork down at what used to be Kootenai Lodge down on the Swan River, a beautiful place. I don't know what's become of it now. And he did bear footprints and drawings and things in the cement there on a patio. Thelma Edwards knew him. They had an artwork by him in their house, she told me. She didn't know what had become of it. It was kind of a diorama or something. Interesting isn't it?

Annemarie: Yes, it is. What organizations did you belong to, and if you would like to talk about any or all of them.

Cecily: For my sins I was once actually president of the NFIA, as it was then. In those days all we did was to talk about whether we were going to have chicken sandwiches or tuna sandwiches. There were occasionally very bitter meetings, usually involving whether to pave the road or not.

Annemarie: This was about what year?

Cecily: I was president of that thing in 1977, and Frank Evans was very concerned about the future of the North Fork, as we all were. We knew what could happen with one man and a bulldozer and money backing him.

Annemarie: Who would that be?

Cecily: Well, Frank Evans was concerned, and he got up in front of one of the meetings at the NFIA when either I or my husband was president of it, and said, "We have to do something about zoning this area or we're going to lose it." And he was right, of course. The word "zoning" was as if you had injected somebody with fiery I-don't-know-what, and people just went bananas over that subject. They didn't want anybody telling them what to do. It's just a current in American psyche that still exists as you can see it today. I had never encountered it, and it never occurred to me to worry about such a thing. You made plans, and you tried to do something, and oh my goodness. Well, the fall meeting that year, I'll never forget it. I was late to it. I had the wrong idea, and I got there late. This was the end of my term for that summer, and I had proposed that we send out a zoning petition. I went into the hall, and Linda Pittman was the secretary then. The entire south wall of the hall was lined with great big beefy men whom I had never seen before in my life, who had been brought there by Ross Wilson, who was very much opposed to zoning of any sort. It was a ghastly meeting. They didn't want anything to do with it.

Not too long after that, it was about the time that I was bringing out the cookbook and it sold well. I don't know that I brought it out as a charity thing, but it sold well enough that I had enough money to do a zoning petition, and that was how it was done. I wasn't president anymore. The [North Fork] Compact did it. It was under their aegis. I will talk about the Compact in a minute. We send out a zoning petition and you have to have 60 percent of your landowners voting positive to have... We didn't get that. Most of the out-of-state people voting for zoning, but the Montana residents either didn't vote or voted twice against it or whatever, you name it, so it didn't go through. Gradually though, over the years zoning became called something more friendly—somehow "land use planning" was more acceptable. You had people beginning to work on it, and of course we now have a neighborhood plan up there, but that was sort of the background for that.

The Compact which I mentioned started about 1973. I hate to tell you, but I think it was my idea, because I was so worried about changes. Mac agreed with me, and then we talked to the Foremans and people from Illinois who knew urban areas and were worried. It was they who pretty much signed it, and I have for you here a list of the original signers, which I thought you would like to have.

Annemarie: Yes.

Cecily: I typed it up, and something of the history of the Compact. It is a land covenant. It went into effect in 1973. It covered at that time about 1,500 acres, and so I imagine some of it's gone back to the Forest Service. The Sondresons, for example, signed it, and their land is now Forest Service, as you know. It meets every year, the second Monday of August. Its main stipulations are no commercial development on your land. If you sign, you don't want any commercial development, and no acreage sold less than 20 acres. We started out with 5 acres, and I want to explain that, because Robert Funk was very active in the beginning of the Compact. He had five acres, and it was out of politeness to him. But then about 1991 Baird [Chrisman] was chairman, and he sent out a petition to the voters from the Compact to change to 20 acres, because that brought it in line with the county. That's all I have to say about the Compact, but I felt I should say something, because I do know about it.

Annemarie: Ralph Thayer also signed it, right?

Cecily: Yes, he certainly did. He's on that list. Yes, indeed.

Annemarie: I wonder how it was that once he was dead the people that bought the land from him before he died could subdivide some of his property into less than even three acres.

Cecily: Yes. I didn't fight that. It may have been something that was grandfathered in some way. I don't understand it myself.

Annemarie: Do you know when Ralph died, what year?

Cecily: I think it was in the 80s [1983].

Annemarie: So, he died long after this went into effect?

Cecily: Yes.

Annemarie: Where is the North Fork Compact?

Cecily: The actual document?

Annemarie: The actual document that shows up on peoples' records, where is it recorded?

Cecily: It's recorded at the County Courthouse. It should be on each person's deed, and they have it in their electronic system there.

Annemarie: Because it doesn't always show up on peoples' deeds.

Cecily: This is another worry. It used to be recorded in something called the Flowered Binder. I mean, this was a very informal county. My understanding is that it's now in the electronic system, but it's there. It's a great worry to me, because the history of land covenants, they generally don't last more than about 30 years. The original impetus and enthusiasm is dissipated very often, either among the heirs of a family or of necessity. Or people buy a piece of land and they don't give a damn.

Annemarie: What other organizations did you participate in?

Cecily: Oh, I belonged to the North Fork Preservation Association, or at least I'm very enthusiastic about it. I don't always remember to pay my dues. And we belonged to the NFIA. I think I've mentioned everything we belonged to.

Annemarie: What do you know about the Polebridge Mercantile, its history and the people who owned it?

Cecily: Who were the first owners that I knew? Was it [Ted and Esther] Ross? Yes, I remember them, and I remember that they had the post office in there, which was a great convenience. It was charming, you know, an old-time thing. The window with one of those grills, I remember. Then I think the Olsons [Bob and Betty] bought it from them. They were very industrious, and they put in an addition which is now no longer there, in which they had pool tables. They were good about helping to change tires and pump gas and were very industrious people, but they were new to the area. They were there seven or eight years. Then Karen Feather and some other people bought it, and Karen pretty much ran it I believe after that. She also started the saloon. I'm very fuzzy on dates about that.

That was the coming in of sort of the hippie generation. I considered her, and I considered John Frederick, to be a hippies. I looked at John Frederick with a great askance and thought, "Oh, my goodness." And, of course, I've come to admire him very much, his persistence, and the fact that he has never been vitriolic about people. I think it is so difficult not to be. There have been all kinds of feuds and difficulties that have developed up there, and he's never been a part of it, that I know of. He's had his difficulties with various things, but I've never known him to be mean. I admire that.

Annemarie: Speaking of feuds, do you have recollection of any feuds that you haven't talked about?

Cecily: Only slightly, because we lived down at the Hammers' and we knew them so well, and we were directly affected by their attitudes. Apparently, as I understand it, and I'm not really an old-timer so I may have this wrong, they wanted to have the post office down on their land by the river, and people would have had to drive all the way in. Opposing them were other persons, including probably the Holcolms and Ruth and Loyd. The bitterness on the part of the Hammers was just unbelievable. It was still there in 1977 at least, which was shortly before they left the area and moved away. I went in to see them on some kind of business, and they had been very close to us. They had been very friendly with Alan and had said, "He's like our son," and all this. He worked for them. They didn't want anything to do with us because we had something to do with the North Fork Improvement Association, and they associated that with Ruth and Loyd and with the delivery of the mail, all of that. I didn't understand it at all. I saw them years later. They

remained friends with certain people, and they made friends with the Chrismans, for example, who asked them up to stay. I was so glad to see them and went over and said, “It’s so sad we lost touch.” It didn’t do any good. It was a deep, deep bitterness. It was very, very sad.

You could tell when people had spent a whole winter up there, with the exception of the Holcolms, because their ideas were kind of skewed. And I think Walt and Hazel reinforced each other. He would say, “Yes, dear, I think so,” and she would say something, and he would say, “Yes, dear, I think so.” It was like mirrors reflecting each other and it just grew into a huge ball of wax. They were better if they had been out for the winter. Anyway, I liked them very much, and that’s always made me very sad.

Annemarie: Going back to the land use issue, when and why did you feel that we needed to have land use planning? Was there a certain point . . . ?

Cecily: It would have been in the late 1960s. We had sort of adjusted. We were building a place at Moose Creek. We could see what was happening. There were more people coming in. The only kind of planning that we ever heard anything about was when we were talking to a neighbor and he said, “Oh if they tried to do that I would just shoot them.” Well, that didn’t seem adequate to us. We came from an urban area, and from Marin County originally, where things were pretty well planned. I just thought it was the civilized thing to do. Actually, the Compact was the first with its restrictions on those who signed. It was the first zoning effort in this county. I’ve been told that by a planner here. That’s really something.

Annemarie: So you saw an influx of...

Cecily: People and there was nothing to keep it from just being divided into a million whatever.

Annemarie: Did you have a realtor on the premises in the North Fork, or was the property being marketed in the valley?

Cecily: I can’t answer that for sure. Certainly it was being marketed in the valley. Charlie Green was very active there. He wanted to sell me what became Rachael Sweet’s place. It was \$11,000 at the time for 300 acres, or something like that. Can you imagine? But I never wanted riparian property. I couldn’t afford it anyway then, but I never wanted riparian property because we lived on the Russian River, or near it, in California and we knew what can happen—people coming through your land all the time. Can we pause that for a bit?

Karen: Yes. After a short break I’m Karen McDonough and I’m going to do a couple of questions for you. We would kind of like to know what kind of transportation you used back when you first started, as opposed to now on the roads.

Cecily: You mean personally, we as a family?

Karen: Yes.

Cecily: For us it was Volkswagen bus all the way. When we first came out here I had a bus that I bought second-hand in Chicago from a would-be sculptor. It was the one that was run into by the old man who didn’t have insurance. It did very well. It went across the continent I don’t know how many times, and we even used it in the winter at home. It was an old-type bus. It had

a divided windshield, and you had to ratchet out the windshield. If you were driving up in Canada, which we did one time, we just opened up and we could see everything, and the dust was behind us because there were no cars. A great car. And we camped in it. Oh my, it was super.

Karen: What were the roads like back then?

Cecily: Not good, particularly after winter and after a lot of logging, and so forth, and if they put down oil it was worse. The edges of the potholes were deeper. There was no paving by [Home Ranch Bottoms] at all. That went in very suddenly. A county commissioner who was friendly with the landowner down there put it in in a hurry.

Karen: Tom Ladenburg?

Cecily: Yes.

Karen: Do you remember what year that was, by any chance?

Cecily: No, I don't. I'm very bad on that. I think the 1970s.

Karen: Can you remember anything that you had to carry in your cars then, as opposed to what we do now?

Cecily: Yes. When the fire danger was high we had to take an axe, bucket, and shovel, and there were signs that reminded you to do this. We usually carried water. We went on a lot of picnics in the bus. One of the things we loved to do most was to go onto the forest service roads and explore back in the Whitefish Hills. We called it taking a jitney. We packed a picnic lunch and either all four of us would go, or just one of the boys when they grew up, and I let them drive back in there. It was one of the great joys. We discovered things that to other people were commonplace. We didn't know about Whale Falls, for example, and there it was. And the bubble ups on Trail Creek. That was all discovery for us, you know. The caves. So many wonderful things.

Karen: I believe that you discovered the Indian trail at that time, too, didn't you?

Cecily: Well, in a way. I realized that it was there. Somebody told me, perhaps, and I saw it where it goes on that scree slope, where you can see it above Tuchuck. That was the first of it that I saw. Then I got very interested in it later when the children were grown and my husband would drive me up there. He would sit and read, and I would go down and hike around in the bushes and find the trail and measure it by pacing it and all that. Still there are things to be found. Duke Hoiland says that there's another cave that's lower down, and he intended to explore for that. He was talking about it last summer.

Karen: Can you think of anything else with driving that you guys really enjoyed?

Cecily: I didn't particularly enjoy driving at night. I'm not answering your question, but I can remember driving from the McFarland's dances down to the Dutch Creek cabin, which was a long way at night, usually at midnight, and the weird things that you would see. There were some birds that took dust baths or something in the middle of the night. I don't know what they were,

but they were down in the road and kind of bathing themselves. There was the inevitable bunny hopping along, lumpy lump. We didn't see deer or anything like that, and I don't think we saw anything big. Anyway, I think I sold that car to Moe Duvall, and somebody used it years later. We got a more modern version of it, and so I have that now.

Karen: Can you remember how you got ahold of each other?

Cecily: Communication? Yes. There were no phones. There were no cell phones, certainly. There aren't now, really. When we first came up there were no radio phones except for the government. You communicated with people because you saw them on the road, or you drove to their place. I remember many instances of that, or you saw them at the store or the dance or the meeting, you know. Then you got your business done, or you wrote them if you really had to, and that's how you issued invitations and keep in touch, that kind of thing. There was one phone line. You may remember it. It ran, I think, from Ford Station up to the Hammers, then I don't know where it went from there. It had been abandoned by the Forest Service and taken over sort of by the local residents. It was a party line, and it was plenty weird. It was the crank-type thing. Alan said lightening would hit down by Ford Station and would travel all the way to Hammers and go zap on their back porch. [Laughs] It just sounds horrible to me, really horrible.

Annemarie: I think the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] workers installed the telephone line.

Cecily: I didn't know that. Interesting.

Karen: In that same vein, we would like to know some of the things you did for fun.

Cecily: Now that's the question I brought up that nobody who were summer people like us would think of that. Every day we did a lot of things, but it wasn't as if our life were divided into fun and not fun, is what I'm trying to say. There was work, and that was sort of fun, like my husband being stark naked and doing all this stuff. [Laughs] Hammering away up there. Anyway, we did do some things that were special. We had treasure hunts just in the family. The hiking was fun, the hikes we took. The group things that we did were fun, and the dances were fun. But I still find that to me it's a strange question. I could understand it if we spent the winters. I can understand it in Chicago, where you want to get away. It's just amusing to me.

Karen: I think so many people don't realize we had, like you said, fun the whole time.

Cecily: Yes.

Karen: Everything we did.

Cecily: Not that we didn't work. Not that we didn't have problems and break our ankles and get bee stings and what have you, but yes.

Annemarie: Karen, you came to the North Fork at what age?

Karen: I was about five.

Annemarie: You have a long history.

Karen: Yes. Could you tell us about the times you took trips and hikes with just the women?

Cecily: Well, I think there were generally some men along on the trips that I remember, the ones that I have pictures of. The hike to Huckleberry, the Aase's were a lovely young couple who were manning that lookout. I believe the Evans' were on that, your mother and kids, Karen, I think. The Edwards boys, I believe, were on that. Thelma was certainly on it, because I remember your mother and Thelma hiking down the trail ahead of me, and I just couldn't catch up with them. They were just yak yak yak. They had known each other for years. They were very friendly with me, but there was this old habit. We hiked Cyclone, and I remember Edna Evans on that hike. We climbed up the very height of the building there, the lookout, and I think you were on that. I remember you being on that.

Karen: You remember me with good thoughts, right?

Cecily: Yes, I do, I really do. I don't have any bad thoughts there. I don't think there was anyone I really disliked. There might have been some people I was kind of scared of. I'm going to go back a little bit. You asked about the hiking. We went up to Logging, and that was kind of interesting. We stayed under the overhang of the old Snowshoe Cabin at the head of Logging Lake, and that was your mother and Thelma. I don't think you were on that. I was on that, and then there was a couple of people from like New York, who were just hikers and they went along with us. I don't think Alan was on that. There were some other people, but I can't remember who. Maybe Edna Evans was on that, I don't know. Anyway, at that point I fancied myself a great fisherwoman. I had some fancy gear, and I went out on the south side of Logging Lake, and I was going to catch me a fish. Later I got back to the cabin and your mother and Thelma were just in stitches. They said, "Did you know that there was a bear watching everything that you did?" That's in the cartoon book. I didn't know anything about it—about 20 feet away from me, and I was happy. What a dummy I was. Anyway, I remember that.

Now, I want to tell you the story, I don't want to forget this. This is the darndest thing that happened to me. I was a very kind of straight-laced person. I had been brought up to be very proper you know, girl's school and dancing school and everything, so getting out here was wonderful for me. I had more freedom than I ever had. When we lived in Dutch Creek we would go down where Camas and Dutch Creek joined together, which is now sort of overlooked by the road, but at that time it was really isolated. There was no Camas cut-off, and the waters ran warm over wide beds of pebbles. They were warmed up by the sun, and we would go down and swim. Not only that, but we didn't wear any clothes. Why should we? There was nobody anywhere around. Well duh, there was somebody up there with binoculars looking down at everything [in the lookout], and not only that, but he told people about it. I think it was two years later Grandma Mathison and I were up on Center Mountain huckleberrying, and here comes this Forest Service person. He said, "Oh you shouldn't be up here, by the way. The road is closed," because they were blasting or something. He asked, "What's your name?" I told him, and he said, "Oh, you like to swim, don't you?" Something in my stupid brain clicked on, and Grandma Mathison was real smart. She said that she had asked someone and they said, "They could see every hair on your chinny chin chin." I was so upset by that. [Laughs] And I wondered how many people thought I was an absolute idiot, but then we had fun.

Karen: I think that's probably a good place to stop, don't you? We'll all take a rest and we'll try to have another date to set up and take some more questions.

Cecily: Yes.

Karen: Thank you so much.

Cecily: You're very welcome. Thank you for doing this. This is a big undertaking. Can I give you some hot soup or something before you go?

[End of recording]