Sheila Bonnand: This is an interview with Adelaine Midgett, taking place in the University of Montana Archives on February 27, 1986. The interviewer is Sheila Bonnand, a student in History 491, Archives Management.

Mrs. Midgett, would you give a brief biographical sketch of yourself?

Adelaine Midgett: You want to know where I was born. I was born in Frazee, Minnesota, and I suppose you want the date? 1910—October 28, 1910. It’s a very small town. It’s still there, about 50 or 60 miles southeast of Fargo, North Dakota, so it’s kind of central in Minnesota. Do you want anything about family? We lived on a farm. We lived on a farm about a mile-and-a-half from this little town, and that’s where I went to school until I was in the eighth grade.

SB: Well, that gets us to why did your family move to Montana at that time?

AM: Well, my dad was having really problems on the farm. Things where he had gone into registered cattle, which is a very expensive proposition. Holsteins, in fact. Somewhere or another, he became interested in this clothing concern, and he became a district manager in Montana. He would have this territory, and so he came to Montana. He was out here, and he liked it. Finally decided he’d sell the farm and move the family out there, so we moved out.

SB: And you moved to—

AM: We moved to Great Falls first.

SB: What did you find Montana like at that time?

AM: It was very different from it is today, of course. I remember that my two brothers stayed in Minnesota to finish out the school year, but I left probably in May with my mother and father and another sister and brother. Those two boys drove out in a little old Ford coupe, and it took days for them to come! The roads were just not good at all. We thought they were pretty good, but the way they are now, there’s no comparison. Great Falls was, to me, a big place, because I lived in this little town—really small town. I don’t suppose there were more than 1,500 people in that little town in Minnesota. Great Falls was really a big place. I liked it, actually. I liked it very much. We all liked Montana. We were really pleased with the state and Great Falls.

SB: Why did you move to Missoula? How did you end up here?
AM: When we moved to Great Falls, my oldest brother—there were five of us—and my oldest brother was a senior in high school. He finished his senior year in Great Falls, and he wanted to go to college. He came to Missoula, and he went to school one year. Well, then I had another brother coming up, and he wanted to go to college. My parents decided...They were education-oriented. They wanted us to have college educations. That as long as my father travelled a lot, all over the state, and in fact, he even travelled into Wyoming, that they might as well move to Missoula because they could not afford to send all of us to college and so we moved to Missoula.

SB: What was Missoula like, then, when you first moved here?

AM: Well, it had street cars, for one thing. (laughs) It was a nice place. It was smaller than Great Falls, but I think we liked it almost better than Great Falls, because we liked the surrounding country so much better than we did Great Falls. When you’re that age, you’re not that aware of what a place is really like or what the surroundings are. You just kind of go along with it. So I don’t remember too much about definite impressions, except that when we moved to Missoula, it was a little difficult for me because I had had two years in high school in Great Falls. It’s pretty tough to go to another town, right in the middle of your high school years, because groups and cliques are already formed. It was a long time before I really became friendly with a group that I could feel comfortable with, and I think that was kind of difficult. But I liked the high school.

SB: Was the high school—

AM: The high school was where Hellgate [High School] is now, but Hellgate has added on two or three additions since then. It was the original building, though.

SB: When did you start going to the University of Montana?

AM: Well, I graduated from high school in 1929. So that fall, I entered as a freshman, and I went my freshman year out here. The Depression did really not hit Montana until about the time I was a freshman in college here. It was a little slow coming west, I guess. (laughs) That’s the only thing I can figure out. So, when it came up to fall that year, there just wasn’t any money, even with tuition at...What? Twenty-eight fifty [dollars] or twenty-nine fifty a quarter to send me. So I stayed out that quarter, because I had two older brothers already in college. One of them was in forestry. He had worked on a lookout all summer, and I believe, fall quarter. I don’t think he was in the University that fall quarter either. When it came up to winter quarter, he said, “I’ll be willing to pay your tuition,” and so I started school again winter quarter, which would be 1931. I knew that I had to get a job or something to help out a little bit, because there just wasn’t that much money with five kids, and three of us, then, in the University.
You want me to tell about trying to get a job out here? (laughs). Are we that far?

SB: We can switch this. Go ahead.

AM: Well, I could type. I’d had two years of typing in high school, and I had a year of shorthand. I thought the best thing was to go to Main Hall and try to get into the Business Office. I went over to the Business Office and was flatly turned down. There just wasn’t anything. To this day I can still remember how I felt when there wasn’t even any encouragement. I mean, “No, there is nothing.”

I always had liked books, and I had read a lot. I really don’t know yet why I drifted over to the library, but I did and asked to be interviewed. Miss Winifred Fiechner (?) was the acting librarian. She interviewed me and talked to me—she didn’t even talk to me very long. She knew I could type and that I was interested in the library, and that day she said, “Well, I think we could find a place for you. It won’t be very many hours to begin with.” I just couldn’t believe it. I just couldn’t believe it after I’d been turned down like that.

I told you this before—and this is nothing against her at all—but she was a little short lady, just about square, and she was really...She was homely. She really was, but I just thought she was the greatest person in the world and she always, she always stayed that way with me. And I think other people felt the same way about her. She was just a great gal.

Anyway, she took me on, and as I remember, 25 cents an hour. (laughs) I wish I could remember what I finally got up to. You know, what tremendous hourly wage I got up to before I graduated, but I really am not sure. (laughs) But anyway, I started working at the University Library and so I could go to school, and I went on and I graduated. I decided that, really, I liked the library and I liked the whole atmosphere and I liked books, and that’s when I found out I was going to come up at the right year to hit the program in the library economy, which the degree was called at that time.

SB: Well that’s how you got involved in the library classes, by getting into the library first, and then going into the library program?

AM: Yes, well, you know, you find out what’s going on, and the fact that there was...I don’t remember the class that was just finishing up, which would be[19]31. But I just simply decided, well this is what I’d better do. I think I was really...Way back, what I really would like to have done, was go into interior decorating, and that was just out of the question because there was nothing in Montana—a school that you could even go to. And I knew I could not afford to go, to be sent away. And so, sometimes you settle for second best, but this turned to be the best before I got through with the whole thing.

Adelaine Midgett Interview, OH 157-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SB: Maybe you could describe a little bit about how that economy program was run. Maybe a little bit of how it differed from the program that’s offered today.

AM: Well, obviously, this was leaning toward equipping you to work in a college library, because with the courses they gave—three quarters of reference and a general reference course. We had classification, which they called cataloguing. We had library administration class, we had book selection, and this was scattered over your two years—your junior and senior year. You also had these other requirements, like two foreign languages, preferably French and German. You were supposed to have certain history courses and certain English courses. Of course, some of those—English is even required now—and you had to work those in along with your library courses, and of course then I was working all the time too.

SB: Sounds like a busy... (laughs) Could you describe a little bit about your student job in the library, what you did?

AM: Well, we had closed stacks. It was in the old, old library before even that warehouse addition was put on the one that’s on campus now. That meant that students would be at the card catalogue, and they had little call slips that they would fill out with the call number and author and title of the book. They’d bring it to the loan desk, and I was what you might call a page. Whoever was the person who was checking out books would hand it to you, and back of the loan desk...The library itself was about two floors. But back of the loan desk, there were five levels. So you were running up and down, depending on where the book was. (laughs) We always were glad when we got something in the 800s and the 300s because that was the level that was right back of the loan desk, those were the books that were used the most. Documents was on the fifth floor, I remember that.

Then we had a little room clear up on the fifth floor in the corner that had, I suppose, books that might be in the Montana Collection now, and it was called the Treasure Room. The call number on the catalogue card had a T-R, which stood for Treasure Room. Then I did typing too. I typed a lot, too. I typed catalogue cards. Catalogue cards, you know, for the life of me I can’t remember whether we got Library of Congress cards at that time. We must have, but a lot of it was original cataloguing, too. So typing cards was...I’ll never forget how many spaces in for the call number, and how many spaces in for the author, and how many spaces in for the title.

Miss Speer was the person I typed for most of the time, and she actually was the documents librarian but she did cataloguing, too. Every librarian, I think, wore about three hats in those days because there weren’t that many. Really, that was mostly what I did. In the summer, I worked at the loan desk, and I worked evenings lots of times in the summer. The big reading room was the one that they eventually made into two different levels when they remodeled the library. We would close the loan desk about nine o’clock and then we would be open in the big reading room until ten o’clock when students could check out some books that were kept in that area. They could check them out overnight. I think, I was trying to remember, I’m not sure...
whether we closed during the noon hour or not. It’s possible we even closed during the noon hour. Mainly because of staff problems, I suppose. We just couldn’t staff the whole thing.

SB: So undergraduates were not able to check out books except a few overnight, or how did that work?

AM: Well, of course, they could check out anything from the regular collection, but these would be books that were on reserve or reference type books. Lots of reference, of course, they couldn’t check out at all, and that was indicated in the book, so we never had any problem with it. But the only people who could go into the stacks were graduate students and faculty, and of course, we had lists of them. So we checked them. (laughs) Faculty you got to know because the faculty wasn’t that large in those days. The graduate students, there was always a list. Of course, they had to have permission, I suppose, from not only a request from a professor, but also the permission of a librarian, I imagine, to check out books.

SB: That’s really different, isn’t it?

Maybe you could describe a little bit of what the University itself was like when you started, were going to school here?

AM: Well, it was small. There was no problem walking from class-to-class, and I wouldn’t even hazard a guess on how many buildings there were, but it was a very small campus. With 1,500 students or a few more, you know that it was small. There was no problem with buildings. (laughs) You knew where everything was. We didn’t have the cars. You know, there weren’t cars all over the place, and of course, at that time, there was a road around the Oval. The mall park that is at the end of University Avenue now that’s closed, you could drive around the Oval. You could also turn off of the Oval and drive down, what would be now, past the Field House.

That was a favorite thing. This was a great thing in Missoula. The kids—we all—we drove down around the NP [Northern Pacific] Depot, and then we came down around the University, and we drove around the Oval. (laughs) That was what we did. If you had a car. But there were very few cars. Most students did not have cars in those days. There was no parking problem. No parking problem at all. I don’t know how many blocks actually. I was out on Mount Avenue at the time, and I could drive a car but I did not drive one to school. I used to walk to school and I used to walk home a noon, and when I worked evenings, I walked back out in the evening. In the summer, when it was hot, you were walking, you’d come home for lunch, you did not eat...I didn’t eat out here. I guess maybe some people did, but not very many. Kids didn’t have that much money.

SB: The street cars then didn’t come up this way?
AM: No, and of course, the street cars were gone in a few years after we moved to Missoula. There weren’t street cars very long. But there were street cars for a little bit.

SB: Did you encounter any problems in going to college during the Depression years?

AM: I guess mostly financial, but you know, you don’t really remember that much about it. You had a pretty good time, and everybody, with the exception of a few, were just about in the same boat. They just didn’t have very much money. I remember that if my dad hadn’t been in the clothing business, that I don’t know what I would have had to wear lots of times, because I didn’t have that many outfits. I still remember a girl who lived across the street from us. Many, many years later when we moved back to Missoula—and she was a very bright girl—and she decided not to go to the University because she just didn’t have the clothes and everything. I remember telling her I had about three or four outfits. That didn’t matter. She did not go to University because she just was not going to go. I think this is a marvelous thing that’s changed, because you don’t have to have a lot of clothes to go now. But there was a time when girls really wore nice clothes.

SB: Was that expected of you as a student, to dress in a certain way?

AM: Oh yes, I think so. I think so. Well, when I came back here to work, there was a regular petition to be able to wear slacks, at least. The first time, you could wear good-looking slacks. No jeans, or things like that, in the library, if you were going to work there. See, that’s all changed. But it’s for the better, I really think. Kids shouldn’t have to be able to...But we used to, when I first came back here to work, we used to love seeing these freshmen come in. They had the prettiest clothes. There were not lots of pants in those days, so they had pretty skirts and sweaters, and it was always fun to see them come because they were dressed so beautifully. But that’s all changed too. Thank goodness that isn’t necessary.

SB: Was there a dress-type code for the men as well, or was it—

AM: Not like there was for the girls. Not like there was for the girls. I can even remember girls saying that they had to...This is when I was no longer here, because there is that 20-some year gap when I wasn’t even here. That girls could wear pants downtown if it was so cold—it had to be a certain temperature—and that was according to the Dean of Women. Can’t believe it!

SB: Could you tell me what you did after you graduated from the University of Montana?

AM: Well, I was lucky. I wish I could remember. There probably were eight at the most—eight or nine people—in our library economy class. One girl had been working part-time at the Missoula Public Library, so she did get a job there, I’m not even sure it was full-time. I’m not sure what some of the other girls did, because a lot of them did not get jobs. See, we did not have teacher certificates. We didn’t have anything to fall back on like that. You either got a job
in the library, or else. But a friend of mine was at Fort Benton, and she’d been there a couple of years, and I knew her—she was a Missoula girl. She had graduated in library economy, and she wrote to me and said she was going to get married and why didn’t I apply for her job. So my dad took me over, and I applied for the job and I got it. I got 105 dollars a month when I first started to work. I just thought that was the greatest thing in the world.

SB: That was a public library, wasn’t it?

AM: It was Carnegie Public Library in Fort Benton.

SB: Did you find it different working in that public library after having worked in the University Library?

AM: Oh yes, I have to tell you, I thought, why did I work so hard for two years to learn all the library procedures, and all the things that we struggled with, (laughs) because the cataloguing is simplified. It’s very simple cataloguing. You don’t begin to have the material. You don’t have to work with journals, particularly. You don’t have that many. It was a nice, small library. What I did was...In Choteau County, were library stations in some of the little towns around there. I think, actually, there were about 12 places like Highwood, and places like that a small branch library, and I made up collections for those libraries. We did it about...Well, Big Sandy was a larger one and maybe we did it every month, but some of them we didn’t do every month, we did it like every two months or something like that. If anybody running the branch library wanted a specific book, they could always call in. You see, when a collection of books came back, why then, I took care of checking them back in. That was one of my main jobs, and then of course, I worked upstairs, too. Because there was only one other librarian, and she was the head librarian. We staggered hours quite a bit so that we weren’t working...Actually, you know, when I went on, I only worked 38 hours a week, which was unusual. But the fact that you had to work three evenings a week was, for like, seven to nine.

The thing that really scared me when I went there was that the high school did not have a library. So the students would come to the public library for everything they wanted. They could even get pass slips to come during the day if they had work they wanted to do in the library. The gal who was the head librarian scared me about these students that you have to watch them all the time. She actually told me that some of the boys had taken the screws out of a table—the legs of a table—and that the table collapsed on one end. I thought, I just never am going to be able to handle this. You almost feel like you’re one of the kids, yet, when you’re just out of school. (laughs) But I never had any trouble with those kids, and I think part of it was that I started going with the coach, and they were...The kids all liked him. In fact, I married him. (laughs) So, I never had any trouble with the students at all, and I really liked them but it was an unusual situation, because you had high school students there during the day lots of times.
The first time I catalogued—I think I told you about it—the woman’s name was Ellen Targubsen (?), and she was a nice person and everything, but you see, I had what was maybe not acknowledged by ALA as a college degree in library science but at least I had graduated in library economy. She had had summer courses, and she was the head librarian. So the first time I did cataloguing, I didn’t abbreviate Boston. Boston was supposed to be abbreviated, “B-o-s-t,” I’d never heard of that and I can’t remember what else I did. So when I went back the next day, she was showing me all of these mistakes I had made in cataloguing, and I just had to stand there and take it. (laughs) Nothing else to do. Jobs were not that available all around. I was just so mad, that I was going to quit. But I went back, and I was already going with Kent, and he calmed me down and everything. I went back and decided, if I get along with her, I can get along with anybody.

She was a nice person, but she was very cold and, maybe, it’s a good way to be. But I think you’ve got to have some nice relationship with your employee, too. You don’t have to be buddy-buddy, but you’ve got to have...I always felt that she held me off. Maybe she felt that I thought that I knew more than she did. (laughs) There’s a possibility, you know. And actually, I couldn’t have done the budget or anything else that she had to do, so she had a lot of things that I could never have coped with. She was very nice to me, really.

Somebody called up one time—they always tell this over at Fort Benton—they called up the library and wanted to speak to me. We had two large rooms upstairs, and then we had kind of a sub-basement—a half-basement with windows and so forth—that you weren’t really down in the basement. They wanted to speak to me, there was no telephone downstairs, and they said, Ellen said, “Well I’m sorry, but she’s working,” and never called me to the phone. That was a big joke around Fort Benton for a long time. “Have you been working lately?” But that was all right. You learned to live with it, and I think I learned a valuable lesson about getting along with somebody when I worked for her.

SB: How long did you work there?

AM: Just two years, and then I got married.

[End of Side A]
SB: Maybe you could describe a little bit about Fort Benton as it was when you got your first job there.

AM: Well really, I don’t think Fort Benton has changed very much. Naturally, it has a lot of history because Fort Benton was as far as the boats would come up on the Missouri River, and so lots of history. But I don’t really think Fort Benton has changed that much over the years. But it was an interesting town. If you haven’t ever been there, the main street runs along the Missouri River, and there’s a park a lot of the way along the river and it’s a very pretty little town. It’s nice because it’s, I think, about 48 miles from Great Falls, and so you can go into Great Falls for shows and even a lot of shopping. People do a lot of shopping in Great Falls from there.

I was kind of—not kind of—I was really homesick when I first went there, because I wasn’t used to that. I’d been in a larger place for quite some time, and my dad is a real wise man. He said, “You remember, you’re in a small town, and everybody’s going to know everything you do.” My dad and I were there that one day that I was interviewed for the job, and then, of course, he had to leave. I did get a place to stay in what was called the Hagen Block (?), probably the one apartment house in town. There might have been a few that had one or two apartments, but this had several apartments. In fact, it was two floors. A teacher who was new that year moved there, and her mother was with her. They suggested that I eat my meals with them, which was just great because they lived in the Hagen Block too. So that’s when I became acquainted with Ruth. She was Ruth Gannaway (?) then. It was nice for me, because then I wasn’t by myself quite so much.

I think that the first weekend Ruth and I were there, the county fair was on. Well, Ruth didn’t have a car, and of course, I didn’t have a car. The fairgrounds was way down at the end of the main street—quite a walk. We walked out to that fair that night, and we met two different fellows and I think maybe she knew one of them. One of them, I think, she knew. Anyway, we got a ride home that way. We heard later that there were three eligible men in Fort Benton, and those were two of them, and the coach was the other one. (laughs) We never got over that. (laughs)

SB: Met two of them your first time out. (laughs)

AM: Oh, really! (laughs) But I had a really good time in Fort Benton. There was a young, married group there. If they had children at all, they were very young children. When I started going with the coach, he already knew a lot of them, and they just accepted me too. We just had a great time, and we went to Great Falls for many, many things. It was just a fun time, because the time before when you’re going with somebody, and before you get married, you have no responsibilities and you got your first job. It was just great, and I really liked it.

Adelaine Midgett Interview, OH 157-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SB: What did you do between—after you left—I know you left Fort Benton soon after you got married.

AM: Yes we did. We moved to Choteau. Now, it’s a very strange thing. Fort Benton is in Chouteau County, which is spelled a little bit differently, C-h-o-u-t-e-a-u. We moved to Choteau, which is in Teton County, and Kent was also the coach there. I think I had been there, maybe just a few months, and Mr. Guthrie was the principal. That’s Bud Guthrie’s dad. He wanted me to do some cataloguing in the school library. So I ended up doing some cataloguing in the school library, and then he wanted me to work some hours in the library while the school was on. For the next couple of years, I did that, before we left. I had banker’s hours. I went just about when I wanted and went home early, and we were closed at the noon hour. After I’d catalogued the books that they’d ordered and everything, I just simply took care of the library. Of course, students would come down and use the library during school hours with a pass slip and check out books. It was kind of nice because I got to know the students that way, and with Kent being the coach, it was really quite nice. We were there for two years, and then we left and moved someplace else.

Choteau was a lot the same size as Fort Benton, and so there wasn’t much difference there. I liked Choteau too, and we still have friends. When we left Choteau...I was trying to think, we went to Harlowton. Lo and behold, they had a whole lot of books that needed to be catalogued there. (laughs) I ended up...I never did work in the school as such with students or anything. All I did was catalogue the books they had. Everything done by hand, write out the catalogue cards, but of course, they were very brief. It was simplified cataloguing. Then have somebody type them. So, they had nothing. They had no card catalogue. They had these books with no card catalogue or anything, and so I often wonder what it’s like now. I hope it’s a lot better than it was when I was there, because it wasn’t very good.

SB: That’s hard to believe that they would have a collection without a catalogue.

AM: Oh yes, no, no cataloguing cards at all. I don’t know what they did about it. I guess I wasn’t that aware of whether they ever tried to check things out or what they did. We went from there to Shelby, and we were there several years. I didn’t work at all in Shelby. I had a youngster by that time, so I didn’t even attempt to work. Shelby was a great town. Teachers could just about do what they wanted in Shelby. Those days, teachers lots of places, really, they were very strict about their behavior and everything else, but Shelby was a very free and open town. We had very good friends in Shelby, friends that we’ve had through the years. I don’t know what happens, sometimes. I have hardly a recollection of maybe one or two people in Harlowton, but Shelby I have people I’m still...They call me, or I call them. A lot of them don’t live there anymore, but we’ve kept up a friendship over many years.
I did not work again until we moved back to Missoula. I didn’t do any kind of library work at all. I did some typing work occasionally for somebody, but that was all.

SB: How did you come to move back to Missoula?

AM: Well, we were in Hamilton...We were living in Hamilton, and Kent decided to get out of school work. He went into insurance business, and of course then it didn’t make any difference really whether you were in Hamilton or Missoula. My parents lived in Missoula, and at the time, I had a brother here, too—a married brother here—and so it just seemed kind of logical to come back to Missoula. So that’s what we did. Of course by that time there was another boy, another child. (laughs) So we came back to Missoula.

SB: And you said you started working again when you got back to Missoula. You got back into library?

AM: Well, I didn’t right away. I didn’t for quite some time, really. I think the younger boy was about...I think he was about fourth grade. A friend of mine who lived in our block, taught at...There was a St. Pat’s School of Nursing at the time. She called and she said, would I consider going over there? There really wanted somebody simply to inventory books. I debated and debated, because with two kids, you really like to be there when they go to school and when they come home. But anyway, she said I could just about set my own hours. So, I decided to go over. What had happened...You see, in many cases—I don’t think it’s as true now—the sisters took care of everything. They took care of the library. Although they had laypeople teaching some of the classes at St. Pat’s School of Nursing, the library had been under the supervision of one of the sisters. She had taken all kinds of books off the shelves, and just chucked them in a little room someplace, and had never pulled any cards out of the catalogue, had never put any notation on shelf-list cards that they were (unintelligible). So I took the catalogue at the shelf-life, of course, and started to inventory the collection, and I couldn’t find these things. I would get along just fine, and then pretty soon, I couldn’t find a book. I finally went to the sister who had been doing it, and I said, “I just don’t know what’s happened to your collection.”

“Oh,” she said, “Those are things I probably pulled because they were old,” and she just didn’t think that they should be there anymore. So she showed me the room, and I had to go into that room and just simply take those books and find the shelf-list card for them and pull the cards from their main catalogue. It was a nice little library. It was a long, rectangular room, and for a school of nursing, it was really a very nice...Then there was a nice workroom at the back, and then there was another room off of that that can be used for meetings and things, which the staff sometimes did in the School of Nursing. It was really a very pleasant situation, but I was afraid to throw out those catalogue cards that I pulled because you never know. If I’m not going to be there, somebody else might think, “Well, I’m putting those books back in.” What I finally did, not knowing what to do with them, I put the cards that went with the shelf list with the shelf-list cards and kept them on the shelf list, just in case somebody wanted to put those
books back in. Because they wouldn’t let me just simply toss them out—completely discard them.

Of course, you know what happens, the sister no longer wanted to run the library, and so they wanted somebody to come and take charge of the library. I ended up working there for almost two years in the library. They were very good to me. I had good hours. I don’t think that I...I didn’t have to be there until about 9:30 in the morning, which meant I got my kids taken care of and some things done in the house. We closed it during the noon hour, so I could go home. Then I left about 3:30 in the afternoon when the kids were coming home from school, so you know, it was really kind of a nice job. Then, on top of that, I said, “I absolutely cannot work in the summer. I cannot let my kids run in the summer.” So a sister took it in the summer. I guess their courses were...I think the girls mainly worked on the floor during the summer and got to practical experience. I don’t think they had classes in the summer, so it didn’t matter quite that much. But it was an interesting job. It really was. Entirely different because it bordered on the medical all the time, and I learned quite a bit. (laughs)

SB: Did you find a lot of changes in Missoula after you moved back, after having moved all around for so many years?

AM: Oh yes, yes. It had grown so tremendously, and the campus had changed so much. All of Missoula had spread all over. It really had spread. Of course, they had started building in Farviews where when we were here before, my two older brothers and I would go out to where Farviews is now, and the boys had a .22 and there are some kind of gullies and canyons there—you can get on one side and see across. We used to sit there, and there were gophers out there. Gophers would poke their heads up, and we had the .22, and we would... (laughs) That’s what it was like, way back in about the early 1930s. So here it was, all grown up as a quite exclusive residential area. So things really changed. But it was nice to come back. I still had friends here, so I enjoyed it. It was nice to be with my folks. They were older, and you know what it is, you become very good friends with your folks after you fought them all those years. (laughs) We just had a very nice time. We liked it.

SB: You worked in the University of Montana Library from about 1958 to 1978. How did you end up back in the University Library?

AM: Well, I had a very good friend, who was a catalogue librarian. So there was an opening—and I was over at the St. Pat’s School of Nursing—and she wanted me to apply, and I said no, because I knew that would be a full-time job and I just didn’t want to do it. So, for a year, I stayed on over at St. Pat’s. Then she was after me again. She said, “We haven’t filled...” Well, I know what happened, the assistant cataloguer took over the reference job in the University Library, and so it was open again. There was another job. So I thought, well, why don’t I go out and just see what it is, and maybe I can work in a half, or three-quarters, time, or something like that. So I came out, and Kathleen Campbell interviewed me and practically offered me the
job on the spot. Of course, it paid so much more than I was getting. I was being paid by the hour at St. Pat’s with absolutely no fringe benefits. I mean, if I happened to be ill a day, you just didn’t get paid. There was no sick leave or anything. So it just seemed like, if I’m going to spend the time, I better get back into something that really pays well and that I really was trained to do. So that’s why I decided to come back to the University Library. The first year, they were really good to me, because I only worked part-time in the summer, which I could work out with the kids all right. So it was really just a godsend, and after that, why, we just worked things out. My husband being in insurance didn’t have an eight-to-five job, and so if there was an emergency, why, one of us would be available. It worked out quite well. I liked being back in the university atmosphere, I really did. It was nice.

SB: I imagine the building was still the old building when you came back, or had it changed?

AM: It was, no, they had put on what they called that warehouse addition at the back. It was just barely finished, there was no tile on the floor yet in the catalogue area—it was just cement. It hadn’t been painted. They used cement blocks to put that thing on (laughs), and they were not painted in the catalogue area. It was a gray-looking place. The only thing that was nice about it was they had a whole row of windows to the north and to the east and to the west, and so the view was spectacular and it was really nice. But it was not a very well-designed warehouse. (laughs) Of course, everything was different because they had open stacks, which I think was just great, really.

But we had windows on the east and west, which could be opened. None of those to the north could be opened. No air conditioning or anything. That place got so bad in the summer in about three o’clock in the afternoon. You talk about production slowing down, I know it slowed down, because people just...If you could have left those windows open at night, it would have been great, but you couldn’t leave them open at night and so it never really cooled off. It was just miserable, really bad. The whole building was. But I always thought the cataloguing...We threatened to kick out a couple windows to the north because we tried to get them so at least they would put in different windows so that they would open to the north. The cataloguing area was all in the section with the windows to the north. Some of the cataloguers were in the west section. I think there were four of them, maybe, at one time. But the other part, the east part with all serials and the order department, and so we had no windows, actually, that opened. We had great big fans—great, huge fans—but that noise. I can still hear it. It’s just not conducive to very good working conditions. But somehow or other we did it. (laughs) You do.

SB: Besides coming back and finding the change in the open stacks and that, were there any other changes in how the library itself was run from when you were a student?

AM: Well, I don’t think there would be too many, really, different changes. I can’t think of anything. I suppose there really were, but I really can’t think of anything that just stands out in my mind that was so different. One thing we had to do, staff was not that great then. You
always had a weekend, every quarter, that you had to work. Yes, you had to... you worked Saturday and Sunday. Course, there was always comp time. You got comp time for that. Sometime when it was, when you wanted to take some time off, and it was supposed to be used, really it was supposed to be used within the quarter, because building up comp time presented problems. That’s kind of difficult. I remember that as being rather difficult, because if you’re in cataloguing, you have not been in touch with what some of the students are after. Maybe in a week or two, maybe there have been some really leading reference questions that have come to the reference desk. You don’t know anything about them unless a person will really alert you, who has been on. None of us like to appear stupid in front of the students when they want to know something. Although it was interesting, you were really so rushed at times, trying to handle that over the weekend, and we weren’t supposed to just sit there either. We took out a catalogue truck of books, either to revise or work on or do filing. We did not just sit there and wait for questions (unintelligible).

SB: You worked the reference desk on those weekends (unintelligible).

AM: Yes, we always worked the reference desk.

SB: Plus, you had to do your cataloguing as well.

AM: Well, I never tried to catalogue out there. That would just be impossible, but cataloguers have to revise...I don’t know what they do now. I don’t think they’re as persnickety as we were. Well, we just felt...Mary Delan (?) was the head cataloguer for about...Actually, I think I came, I started out here in November of ’57, which is almost ’58. She was there until 1970 when I...She retired. She was retiring early. Her husband had retired, and he wanted to travel and so Mary retired. Then I was appointed head cataloguer. I used to take books out and revise the catalogue. They were ready to go on the new bookshelf after I was through with them. Then we had people who did the filing in the card catalogue. They would red flag the card they had just filed, and so we revised that too. Maintaining the card catalogue is tremendous. It’ll be the best thing in the world when they can have that all computerized. Because it’s expensive business. The cabinets alone are so expensive, and this keeping it up by filing every week and pulling cards, it’s endless. It’s just absolutely endless.

Then the funniest things happen. I found out that water resources was a special catalogue at one time. Special catalogue. Then they wanted everything in the main catalogue. This is when I was here. So we filed everything—took everything out of the water resources catalogue and interfiled in our main catalogue. Now I understand that water resources has been pulled out. (laughs) It’s kind of a circle that we go around, I guess. (laughs)

SB: What changes did you find in your job over the 20 years you were back here? Were there major changes over that time?

Adelaine Midgett Interview, OH 157-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
AM: Well, I’ll tell you one of the major changes. They decided to—when we were going to move into this new library—that they were going to catalogue the serials. I mean, all the journals...All the periodicals were on, I believe, third floor of the warehouse section. They were alphabetical by the title of the journal. Unclassified, but they were on what was called a wheeldex. On the wheeldex was a card for each one of the journals, and it would give the beginning date—our holdings, in other words—the beginning date, and if we had it to-date, or if there was a gap, that was on there. Everything was on there if a person wanted to find out what our holdings were. They decided, when we were going to move into this library, that journals should be classified so that everything is together on a subject. That was a tremendous project. To start on that was just...We had to have it done by the time we moved, because we wanted everything right when we moved. We had to be sure about size if it was Q size. Of course, lots of journals are. They had to know that to allow for it on the shelving when they came into new library. I didn’t have to do that, fortunately. Public services Librarian had to take care of that. (laughs) It was amazing how it worked—very interesting thing.

That was one of the big things that happened when...The move, of course, and to prepare for the move and everything. But other than that, a lot of the catalogue was the same, except that what we finally did, we subscribed, eventually...At one time, see, we always ordered Library of Congress cards. It’s very expensive, very expensive to do it. They had a formula. They knew what we wanted. Then we subscribed to Library of Congress slips. They were just like a Library of Congress card, except they were just a slip. I’m sure you’ve seen them.

SB: No.

AM: Haven’t you really? Course, those had to be filed every week, and they would come in great, big boxes. The trouble is, you see, you’re filing a lot of things that you’ll never receive the book for. But on the other hand, when somebody knew that we had that, that book would come over with that card in it and we started producing our own cards. That was in the new library. Did we do that in the old? No, I don’t think we did it in the old library. I think it was after we moved into this one.

SB: So when you typed all the cards here from that, that’s what (unintelligible)?

AM: Yes, you didn’t do...you simply reproduced them. You didn’t type them. The department that did all the mending and that sort of thing and put the pockets in our books—did all that sort of thing—devised this method, and they simply reproduced them. They had a deal they could slip the card in that we wanted, and then they knew how many, from the work slip, how many cards we wanted. They would reproduce them like that. Then when they came back they were practically ready to be filed in the card catalogue. It was really—

SB: So you got out of typing cards by hand during those 20 years too?
AM: Yes. We hadn’t done that when I came back, because they subscribed to the Library of Congress cards, and all that was necessary was, on the work slip, which went along with every book, was the classification number and any corrections because every Library of Congress card did not fit the book we received. Sometimes the publisher was even different or something like that. But no, we did not type...The only thing we typed, of course, was original cataloguing. Anything that was original had to be typed. We had about three typists, I guess.

SB: So you didn’t have computers at the time you were here?

AM: We didn’t have...the only thing that they finally had was the order department had a computer. That was it when I retired.

SB: You just missed out. (laughs)

AM: I know it, and don’t think I don’t think about it. I think I really...It makes me kind of...kind of upsets me, that I feel like, gee, I’ve been kind of passed by on some of these things, and I don’t like that very well. But it’s just great, I’m sure. I don’t know...not much I can do about it now. (laughs) It’s happened.

SB: From when you...the end of your career, were there any procedures that you were doing in cataloguing that were still the same as the 1930s when you were a student, or had things really changed a lot?

AM: They hadn’t changed that much, actually. Because if you’ve got Library of Congress cards, you see. See, we always stayed with the Dewey Decimal System. Now, we had a lot of meetings...pros and cons of going to the Library of Congress classification. Bozeman did, you know. Bozeman library went to Library of Congress classification. What they finally did, you see, was it separated their collection. Now, maybe it’s all...Without a doubt it’s probably all Library of Congress now. But the last time I was over there they hadn’t been able to do a lot of it. At a certain date, you started doing Library of Congress. We had meetings...we had to do all the research we could think of. We would come to meetings, and we’d read everything we could about the pros and cons of one system versus the other and which was the better of the two. We finally decided that we just had to stay with Library...or with Dewey Decimal. You don’t know whether it’s still the wise thing to do or not. You just don’t know. But that’s still...Some of those Dewey Decimal numbers get so tremendously long, and you see, that was not true back in the ‘30s. That’s one thing that’s changed. Some of them are just so long. I noticed these cards come from Willenrow (?) they’re on two lines, you know.

SB: (whispers) We better—

AM: Did I go over?
SB: I think I’m done with my questions now. Thank you very much for your time.

[End of interview]