Funding for this transcript provided through a cooperative project of the Montana Committee for the Humanities, the Women's Studies Program, and the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library.

Summer 2000

Anna T. Beckwith Interview, OH 049-052, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
Kathy White: Anna, I wanted to talk with you briefly about your parents’ lives and their points of origin. Your father came from New Brunswick, Canada, is that right?

Anna Beckwith: That’s right.

KW: Can you tell me something about how he happened to come to Montana and when he came?

AB: Well, there were other relatives out here who had businesses and they, I don’t know this for a fact, but I’m quite sure that it was really the economics of the family that brought them because they could find more work for all the children they had, the boys and—

KW: They had quite a number of boys?

AB: Yes, they, well, they must have had at least five boys by that time. They didn’t all live to be adults, they died when they were, many died when they were young but there were some that, oh, there was my father and at least two uncles that grew to be adults.

KW: So they thought there was more opportunity in Montana?

AB: In Montana.

KW: What year did they come?

AB: In 1886, they came to Missoula.

KW: Do you know why they picked Missoula? Oh, it was because of the relatives that were here.

AB: Yes.

KW: What business did they engage in? Were they farmers or where they lumber people?

AB: Well, I don’t know what they did in Canada. I don’t ever remember my father talking about it though I suspect that they, they lived on a farm of some kind, but what my grandfather did I don’t know. But here in Montana, the Missoula Mercantile was president of the Missoula Mercantile, was operated by an Uncle of mine who was a brother-in-law of my father’s and my
father worked for him, two of them, my father’s brother that was alive then worked for him too.

KW: Oh, I see. The one that—

AB: And the Missoula Mercantile, yes. What?

KW: One of the older sisters was married to him?

AB: Yes, the oldest daughter, Clara.

KW: Now, was that the McLeod family?

AB: McLeod, C.H. McLeod. Then we were relatives, my grandmother was a Hammond and her brother, her brothers lived in Montana. She had at least three brothers that I know of and they were lumbermen and they, there headquarters were up the Blackfoot and so forth and one of them was in business with Mr. Eddy who was the originator of the Missoula Mercantile Company. They were partners for a while. Then my uncle Andrew Hammond went out to the Pacific coast, and Uncle Herb was the president of the Missoula Mercantile Company. He would be a brother-in-law of my father’s, and A.B. Hammond of the Hammond Lumber Company on the coast would be an uncle of my father’s.

KW: So it seemed like there was plenty of opportunity—

AB: Yes and it was the family businesses that gave them work.

KW: Now, what about your mother’s family?

AB: Well, my mother’s father was a lumberman in Minnesota and Wisconsin and he...He was camp superintendent and so forth in the days when you got to be superintendent by licking every man in the camp. Things were kind of rough. But he was a very able person and he was offered the job of running the mill at Bonner. That’s why they came out. After they’d been out here two or three years—i’m not sure of just how long—the ACM Company [Anaconda Copper Mining Company] built a lumber mill at Hamilton. My grandfather went up there and was the superintendent of that mill as long as it was open.

KW: So, your mother came to Missoula as a small girl?

AB: No.

KW: Or a teenager?

AB: She was an adult. She was a teacher. She taught school here in Missoula. I forgot about

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that. She had been a teacher in Lacrosse, Wisconsin, where her, where they lived for a couple of years before they came out so she was around 20, 21. My aunt, who’s her sister, was a little younger.

KW: Your mother and your father met in Missoula, then?

AB: That’s right.

KW: When were they married?

AB: In 1902 and they were married in Hamilton where my grandfather lived at the time. They were married. Did that go off? Excuse me. [laughs]

KW: They moved to St. Ignatius soon after they were married. What took them to St. Ignatius?

AB: My father was offered the job of running the Missoula. They bought the general merchandise store, at St. Ignatius and my father was given the job of managing it. We found out that he, professionally, he was called a licensed trader in Montana. We had never known that until we made out birth certificates one time after we were grown but he ran the store then the rest of his life. When he was ready to retire, however...well, maybe before that, I had two brothers and they had divided the business in some way so that my brothers ran the store and my dad took care of all the rest of the business, which was the dealing with wheat. They had a granary. They built a granary and he bought and sold wheat and there were other things too. He sold large machinery, at one time, threshing machines and all kind of things.

KW: Was St. Ignatius purely reservation at the time they moved up there?

AB: Yes, it was on the Flathead Indian Reservation and they moved, when they moved to St. Ignatius the only other white people outside of the two schools for girls which were operated by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, no, no, the Sisters of Charity of Providence and the Ursuline nuns and then the Jesuit fathers had a school for boys and they were the ones that built the church at St. Ignatius; that’s quite well known. And the other, outside of that, there was one family, white family, a stagecoach driver, and he drove the stage from Ravalli, from the railroad up to Polson where they put the freight on the boat that went on up to Somers and Kalispell and they used to change the horses, see Ravalli is lower than St. Ignatius, about six miles and they had to climb that hill so they had to change the stage horses in St, Ignatius and he and his family lived back of our house down in the gully a little ways. We used to sit on the back fence and watch them change the horses. That’s where we learned to swear.

KW: [laughs] On the back fence? You had brothers and sisters?

AB: No, just two brothers.
KW: You had two brothers. How was your life in St. Ignatius? You, there wasn’t a large influx of white people until the ’20s right, when it was open for the homesteading?

AB: Yes, but in the teens Reclamation Service, and I can’t give you dates on any of this, but I remember very well the Reclamation Service built a dam at St. Mary’s Lake and then one at Polson and they started that irrigation project that they have up there and their main office for many years was in St. Ignatius and they had quite a crew of people in the office there and they moved in with their families and all and then when there were more people there, then in 1910 they opened the Reservation, the land and homesteading and a lot of more people came and then other businesses came in. There were, oh, there was this leather store, a general store and two or three pool halls and a meat market and eventually the bank, a bank, and I can’t remember.

KW: What year were you born?

AB: I was born in 1903.

KW: So you remember the influx of white settlers?

AB: Oh, yes, very well and my father got, got his first car in 1910 and we used to be able to drive almost, my dad would just say, “Well, I’m going over here” when he’d see something over there. He’d drive off the road across the prairie over the grass and trying to avoid any rocks and so forth, no fences or anything. That all came after—

KW: That all came after the large number of settlers came?

AB: Yes, and the cars didn’t run very well in those days like they do nowadays. We take the hills without thinking anything about them. My mother and dad had a friend who built a... who homesteaded some land. She built at the foot of the mountains, and she built a house. Her house that she lived in up there up this hill and that, our dad’s car, couldn’t make it up to her house. He’d go as far as he could and them we had to get out and walk the rest of the way and it used, so I used to think of it being real high on this mountain. Well, actually it wasn’t at all. It didn’t go up to the timber line.

KW: What was it like being raised on a reservation—three white children in a predominantly Indian community? Was there a lot of separation between white kids and the Indian kids?

AB: No, no there wasn’t. Now I didn’t go to school until, well, I was seven years old. That would be 1910, wouldn’t it? They built a school, one room, no, they built a two room school and I’m not sure whether it’s still there or not, up until recently it was still there, but we started in a tent because the school wasn’t quite finished and they had tables and chairs, little chairs and little tables in different parts of the rooms and the teachers, I think we had two teachers, yes, and they sort of graded us and put us in different groups in this one big rooms. We went to

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school about six weeks in those until the schoolhouse got finished. By that time, they’d sorted out the children, but it didn’t make any difference whether you were an Indian or whether you were white. Of course, with people coming in like that there were more than three white children but there never was any discrimination about Indians in the schools.

KW: And so you all played together—

AB: I can’t remember that there was, I really was not conscious of discrimination until I got to be an adult really, almost.

KW: You didn’t have admonitions by your parents to play with certain people or socialize?

AB: Oh, no. We could always take people home. My mother insisted that we come home after school, and if we wanted to go someplace we had to get her permission to go. I suspect that she...Well, I’m sure that she watched who we played with, but if we...Some of our friends were Indians or some of them had some white blood and some Indians blood. We called them “breeds” but we never called, I mean we’d speak of that. “Breed” was kind of a derogatory term, and yet we had many friends that were “breeds” that we weren’t...that we liked, you know, and got along. We never spoke in terms that they were a breed because it was a derogatory term, but there was no discrimination in terms of Indian as a whole.

KW: Did you, living in a rural community like that, did you have the kind of social life that is usually associated with people who live in towns, that is you had library access and maybe books and music in your home or did you feel that you were living a rural lifestyle. Did you keep animals and live more of a rural—

AB: No, we ourselves didn’t but that went on around us of course. And that window, I’m going to have to tell them that it’s awful loose, you see the wind blows against it and it’s loose, blows this way and makes a noise every once in a while. No, we lived in town and we had...My dad owned horses. We drove horses and he had buggies. We had a freight team, for instance, that hauled the freight up from Ravalli, freight for the store from Ravalli.

KW: You’d meet the train in Ravalli and then come up that steep hill?

AB: Yes, and haul the freight up, yes, but they were in the barn and he men, he employed men to look after them and do all of that work and I remember there was a, Bill was the man who took care our personal horses and he milked our cow, we had a cow, and he’d milk the cow and bring mother a pail of milk everyday that she put in milk cans for the cream to rise and that sort of thing. We didn’t have a garden until the First World War, and then my family didn’t do it. There was a Belgian man who got out there, came out there, oh, he was middle-aged I suppose. He seemed kind of old to us, but he’d lived a long time out there. I don’t suppose he was...I suppose he was middle aged. He wasn’t very old, but he was a gardener and he put in our garden and looked after it, both the vegetables and flowers for years. Of course my
brothers always had to mow the lawn. When they got old enough to mow the lawn they had to do that, and my mother used to water the lawn when it got watered. We always had dogs, a dog or two, but we didn’t... we personally didn’t. But we visited ranches, and we played with ranch kids and the thing that rural life in terms of entertainment and so forth. We went every place as a family, on picnics and dances, and my mother was a great picnicker and, oh, my dad liked to too. I think every Sunday through the summer, certainly every Sunday when the sun shone, we went on a picnic. We didn’t stay home.

KW: Where did you go on your picnics? Did you go different places?

AB: Oh, we had beautiful places and we used to go up to St. Mary’s Lake and up Mission Creek was one of the places, we couldn’t get the car up into the canyon very far.

KW: Did you go up the falls?

AB: No, we couldn’t get up that far with the car but, at least in those days, with horses even when you rode, but within driving distance and we’d go down Mission Creek, it used to be very pretty to go down Mission Creek and oh, two or three miles and then sometimes they’d all gather at some ranch for some doing as it were going on. Then the schools after the schools got going they had doings, you know, athletic, they had track meets and basketball games and things and the whole family went.

KW: What kind of sports and games did the kids engage in? You had two brothers, did the three of you play together as a family? Did the girls and the boys play the same kind of sports games?

AB: Oh, yes, oh yes. I was a tomboy and I played everything my brothers did and I bossed them and I was the oldest in my family but only, I only 15 months older than one brother and three years older than the other brother so we were pretty close together and I bossed them terribly and they had stories about me and what I would make them do and so forth [laughs] but we had a lot of fun.

KW: What games did you play out there?

AB: Oh, baseball and kids games that they can make up, you know, we had a, I can remember one couple of years we had a pilot game we used to go down and play at Mission Creek which doesn’t look anything like it did in those days, you know, it was real pretty creek in those days and lush and green. We didn’t, we had very few places to swim and the only place we swam and were allowed to swim was up at St. Mary’s Lake and that was, we had camped up there two summers and my father had what they called a boom built out because where the water came down, you know, and made a, what do you call those things, anyway it was shallow where they’d wash the gravel down and it was shallower—
KW: And there was a little bit of sand.

AB: yes, and in the spring time the water would come down and do this and he had a boom of logs built around that that we couldn’t got behind.

KW: Yes, because that lake is very deep.

AB: Oh, it just goes right straight down when you look at it. There was this one place where we camped which was very pretty, but it would be dry by that time. There’d be no water coming down, and but it was a good place...I was a...I don’t say it was a good place but it was a fair place, and there was always somebody watching us. We never went in, and of course, they never in that camp alone. There were always adults around. My mother and my aunt stayed there most of the time with us, and we always had company. You see, it was only 13 miles from home, and Dad came up every night. That was about 1913 and ‘14, I think. I know when the Reclamation started around...It must have been around 1915 or ‘16 because after they started that dam business that put a stop to camping up at St. Mary’s. It spoiled the lake.

KW: Did your mother and your aunt go swimming?

AB: Yes, everybody did.

KW: What did you all wear to swim in in 1915?

AB: Well, we had swimming suits but I can’t remember what they looked like except that my mother and my aunt went swimming maybe in a slip or something, and if there was company up there they never went in but you see that—

KW: Oh, I see. When people were gone they—

AB: But every once in a while some of the girls would come up and they’d have bathing suits just like everybody else, which were skirts and full blouses. They had short sleeves and sailor collars, and they had pants that came down to the mid-calf—some of them. Oh, very dressy bathing suits.

KW: Very hard to swim in, I suppose.

AB: Yes, and you really couldn’t swim very far but my brother, well, I did too, really learned to swim. Of course after we got cars, automobiles, and more people in the valley they used to go up to Polson and swim. Then the Reclamation put some, like little, they weren’t lakes, but there were reservoirs around and they’d swim in those.

KW: Did you use to go up the Twin Lakes or weren’t they built then?
AB: Twin Lakes, I don’t know, we didn’t, I don’t know where Twin Lakes is.

KW: That’s where the road that connects up with the Jocko road. [loud noise]

AB: What in the world?

KW: Somebody is tearing down the walls [laughs].

AB: You hear the funniest noises every once in while. Once and a while I wonder if the building is getting loose or something.

KW: Anyhow, Twin Lakes are on the road that goes over to the Jocko road that connects with the Jocko—

AB: Oh, there, no we never went up there. Those are just trails. They didn’t have roads.

KW: There wasn’t a road along there by that time. The ditch wasn’t built along there then.

AB: Oh, no, oh no. That wasn’t built for years later. The ditch has been expanded. The first ditch that went in was the ditch that the built from St. Mary’s down through the canyon...[loud noise] Isn’t that funny? I think probably there...I don’t know. They lost most of the water on the way down, that’s why that ditch is cemented and when it got cemented it water ran through with such speed that it scared the living daylights out of everybody and my brothers they didn’t, the road wasn’t very good up there and you avoided going up there and unless you knew the road it really was a very dangerous road and not too much better now, I think.

KW: It’s really not.

AB: Doesn’t that water going down there scare you though?

KW: Pretty fast along the ditch and especially when it’s muddy and it’s really slippery.

AB: Why, yes and you can’t get out. Animals have gotten into it and they’ve found them down, there’s a ditch down where they, that they’ve put in to stop the debris and so forth and they’ve found them down there dead.

KW: Find deer and things.

AB: Deer. I think they’ve fenced most of it now.

KW: You said that you spent a lot of time with your mother and your aunt off camping or—

AB: Well, we had those two summers, we had those two summers and my mother and dad
didn’t have any, never had any other camps but as a child growing up, I mean, and when I got to be a teenager and so forth, the McLeod’s here in Missoula built a place at Seeley Lake and we used to get invited up there a lot, all the kids got invited up there and my cousin Helen Macleod, who became Mrs. Richards, Helen Richards, used to supervise us up there and so that’s the other place that we used to go a lot, but outside of picnicking we didn’t have any overnight camping and that sort of thing.

Oh, I remember a couple of times we spent, the whole family, spent a night up at St. Mary’s Lake or something, but nobody slept. My mother, neither my mother nor dad liked sleeping on the ground. They were quite heavy, and they were getting middle aged by that time. I was one of those people...I said in a derogatory tone they didn’t like sleeping on the ground. I was really the one that they had...They put me on the ground a couple of nights the first time we ever went up there...I forgot about that. We didn’t camp where we camped later. We had two tents, and I remember and I was awake all night long and I kept waking them up. All the kids slept in the tent where my mother and dad were, and they had this long bed made up on the ground for us. There were six of us, and we ranged in age. I was the oldest which would be about nine, maybe, down to babies, really, almost. My cousin here in Missoula, Fran Maclay, is seven years younger, so she’d be about three. Then she had a brother that would be about five, and Blake would be about seven. Then I had a brother that would be seven, and another brother that would be nine and I’d be ten. Well, anyway, I kept waking them up all night. There were spiders on me and there were snakes coming and I could hear bears and—

KW: No wonder you didn’t like to go camping! [laughs]

AB: Finally I heard my dad say, “I’m going to bring a cot up for her.” So we brought an army cot up, and they put it at the foot of the bed so they never tried to put me on the ground there again.

KW: So that worked out better.

AB: Who made most of the decisions in your family about money or how the children should be disciplined and that kind of thing?

KW: Oh, I think my mother did and most things she got what she wanted but I can’t remember any arguments or anything like that. That was one thing about my mother and father, they, as far as we kids were concerned, they appeared to be getting along just famously. We used to, my dad always got up at night if we woke up in the night. We called my dad. We didn’t call my mother, because he was always the one that responded even when we were babies. He used to help my mother get us for bed at night when we were real little we were bathed and so forth, so he was real good about that. He was a very quiet kind of a guy, and everybody liked him. He got along with everybody.

My mother was full of energy, high-strung, nervous, loved to boss, very able, you know,
capable, was in everything that was in and probably organized a great many things in St. Ignatius like that. Ladies Aid and the woman’s club and a few things like that, helped organize them, and she was, we were Episcopalians, my family were and she got together all the Episcopalians in the valley and they got the State Episcopal Bishop’s office made, had a mission school and the Episcopal minister up at Hamilton used to come and preach a sermon once a month in the Methodist Church and the Methodist minister went out to another mission where they were, you see, so things were very friendly and so forth. I never knew that there was, that people had fights over, on a religious basis between the Catholics and the Protestants and the Methodists and somebody else and that sort of thing until I became an adult really.

KW: Do you think that’s partly just because of the frontier sort of situation they had to help each other out?

AB: Well, that’s true, and my mother and father were just not that way. Of course, they were. My dad ran a store, and as far as business was concerned, he couldn’t be too much that way.

KW: Right.

AB: But he wasn’t that, they weren’t that kind of people anyway, I don’t think.

KW: Did your parents have a pretty active social life in St. Ignatius? Woman’s Club visits and—

AB: Oh, yes, yes. My mother was, as my aunt used to say, “Eva gets bored and when she gets bored she stirs things up.” She used to [laughs]. If she wanted a dance and thought there should be a dance, why, she organized a dance.

KW: Where there was a dance, did your parents ever leave you at home with a baby sitter or did—

AB: Yes, and my mother had help most of the time when we were babies. We, there were two Indian, well, they were part Indian girls, Addie and Nanny, and they had been down at the sister’s school and I guess they were old enough to leave. They came quite young and they weren’t always there at the same time but one or the other was with our family for years and the we had, there was a Mabel, when we were little babies, I don’t even remember this, there was a Chinaman that was our cook and they could leave us with people but when we were babies there really wasn’t much, there weren’t very many people out there, you see, but when after 1910, along in there, later years, when people began coming in and things, why, we used to stay home and then of course, we got old enough too that we could look after ourselves.

KW: But your mother did have some sort of child care?

AB: Oh, yes and help.
AB: —and there weren’t very many out there that I know of or ever heard of.

KW: Well, maybe people left from the railroads that went through Ravalli?

AB: I suppose so, I suppose so. I really don’t have any idea about it. I’m not even, there’s always been Chinese restaurants here in Missoula and in other bit it is Montana so I imagine, I assume that’s where they came from.

KW: But you don’t really know the history of that. So, your mother did have quite a bit of help. Did you keep up a big house?

AB: Oh, yes.

KW: Did she keep up a big house, I mean?

AB: Well, we had, they started out with a six-room house and they built a nursery on. They first built a kitchen on and they built a kitchen away from the house but there was a passage way between them that was oh, maybe, 12 feet, 12 or 14 feet away and that expanded into a room at one time, and the nursery got turned into my mother and dad’s bedroom and there bedroom got turned into the dining room and, you know, there were nine, there were, let’s see, three and three would be six and seven, I think there were nine, nine rooms in the house. Of course, when they first went out there they didn’t have running water or anything like that. My dad put in running water and the old, the old laundry room became, where they did the laundry, became our bathroom, it was off the kitchen, so you always had, to this day in that house, they remodeled it, but I expect you still go to the bathroom through the kitchen. We couldn’t put a bathroom up stairs ever because the house wasn’t strong enough to carry the weight. We had lamps we carried. We were allowed to carry candles, but we couldn’t carry lamps when we were little. We had lamps and all and when I got to the age were it was my job to wash all the lamp shades and everything. Every one got smoked up sometimes, you know, the night before. Trim the wicks and do that. That was an awful job. Then we got pressure lamps. They were, I think, they were run on cool oil, but they had mantles, little mantles, that they used to. Anyway, I was always afraid of those, and I got out of taking care of those.

KW: Did your brothers take care of them or somebody—

AB: I think Phil did, I don’t remember about Jack.

KW: Did you kids have different chores? Do you think your chores were segregated by sex or were they—

AB: Oh, no. I helped with the dusting and the bed making and things like that and my brother’s...
job was splitting wood and carrying in the wood for the kitchen stove and we heated by stoves, by wood stoves and the fireplace in the living room and the kitchen we had some coal but coal was awfully expensive because it had to be hauled so far and we only had enough coal in the winter time to bank the kitchen fire.

KW: At night.

AB: At night to keep the water from freezing, yes the pipes from freezing. And we had, I vaguely remember when they put the water system in, they did that when they built the nursery.

KW: What were some of the other chores that you had as kids?

AB: Oh, I don’t remember. I can’t remember. They couldn’t have been very onerous.

KW: Yes, because they weren’t something that you—

AB: I used to have to dust. I know we had a dining room table that’s out at the ranch out here, the Maclay ranch now, and I hated that table because it was an old oak table and it has one, two, six legs that are this kind, and those had to be dusted all the way down, and bars, great heavy bars. I’d get down of my knees—

KW: Had to crawl around [laughs].

AB: Crawl around under there and I did that until I was as tall as I am, well, taller than I am now because I used to be taller.

KW: I guess something can be said for contemporary furniture.

AB: Yes, definitely. I don’t dust around here until I, I’m kind of embarrassed, they come around once a week and run the vacuum cleaner and clean the bathroom and those two things get taken care of but dusting the tops of things—

KW: Your high school years, did most of the kids in St. Ignatius go ahead and go to high school? Was there always a high school there or did—

AB: No, there wasn’t always a high school but by the time I got ready for high school there was. Part of it was, I mean it was, they built additions onto the school and then they built, later they built a new school that had some for the high school but it also had 8th grade, I remember, and I was very late getting through school, first I was seven years old when I first went to school and that year I got polio and was out the rest of the year, I think it was only about six weeks that I went and I started the next year and got into the 2nd grade and then got small pox and was out the rest of that year.
KW: All of those childhood diseases that—

AB: So, I never went to school until I was in the 3rd grade and I would be...Let’s see, seven, eight, ten years old by then...10 or 11. My birthday is in March, but that was the first year I went the whole year and I made up all three grades.

KW: Were you pretty much weakened from having so much illness, like polio is pretty hard—

AB: Well, that’s why, one of the reasons why I’m so crooked now. It isn’t all arthritis, though the arthritis is getting. Then they didn’t know so much about polio in those days as they do now, though Dr. Symes says they don’t know much about it now. But it’s just one of those things that he said we know how to prevent it and that’s about the best thing that we know.

KW: Well, that’s interesting that you mentioned that you had both of those things because they’re things that we forget and used to be quite common.

AB: One of my brothers had polio at the same time I did and was much sicker but he was not left with the atrophied muscles that I had and the only thing that was noticeable about him was his right hand and that whole hand was smaller and the first finger and the thumb were very, had no muscles in them at all and if you shook hands with him you could feel the smaller hand and all and there was no muscle there, much of anything. At any rate, then my brothers were vaccinated, that was in the old original kind of vaccines that they did, when they scraped the skin and put the vaccine on it and then put a pill box, wrapped a pill box over it and they, as soon as they diagnosed that I had small pox, because I was one of the first ones on the Reservation to get it at that time, and they were vaccinated so they didn’t get it. And then of course we went through measles and we didn’t get dyptheria in our family and they had epidemics of dyptheria and a matter of fact, when I was about 11, 12 in there, there was a dyptheria epidemic and there were two little girls that I used to play with a lot, one was a little older than I am, the other was a little younger, and there father was the barber in St. Ignatius, real nice people, and both those little girls died. My mother felt so badly about this. It was in the dead of winter, and then in those days they buried people that had communicable disease at night. You couldn’t have a regular funeral for them. These two little—

KW: Was that because of the disease?

AB: Yes, yes. It was in the days when you had to move out to fumigate, they...Would you like...I’ve got some tomato juice in my refrigerator that’s cold.

KW: It would be nice to have a glass of water.

AB: And then my mother felt so badly about it that she didn’t have any flowers, and but we had a beautiful great, huge Christmas cactus that my mother had been petting and loving and
growing. It had been given to her as a young woman up in Hamilton, a friend of hers gave it to her, and she’d had it all the years she was married and all. It really got quite big. It was in a bay window that we had at home and it was in bloom. So she cut these fronds and made a blanket kind of a thing because you couldn’t make a regular bouquet out of them. They don’t grow that way. They’re flat blooms. Anyway, she cut them, every one of them off for these two little coffins, made this blanket, and sent them over. They were very much appreciative but the thing that happened was that Christmas cactus bloomed twice a year from then on. Yes, my mother, it did. It bloomed in Christmas and it bloomed in the spring.

KW: Isn’t that something?

AB: She was quite...That had a lot of meaning for my mother because she’d felt she’d done a good deed and it was a sacrifice to her and to have that happen it was just wonderful.

KW: Okay, so you were later than you probably should have been when you were graduating from high school?

AB: Not much because I was 18, because I made up the time. The 8th grade was kind of combined with the 9th grade in high school. I mean I was still taking some 8th grade, and I took some 7th and 8th grade subjects both together too and that’s why.

KW: They were a little bit loose about doing that in education at that time.

AB: Yes, well, you could with kids. You were all...You had the same teachers often times, though we used to have by that time we had four or five teachers at St. Ignatius instead.

KW: And you were divided into grades. Did you, when you were in high school, did you get a job or do any kind of work outside the home?

AB: No, I didn’t, never thought of working.

KW: Had you decided by the time you were in high school that you wanted to go ahead and go to college?

AB: I decided, no, I decided during the war, World War One, which I was just dying to get into. All of us Beckwiths were, but we were all too young, you see. I had two women cousins who drove, well, one of them did occupational therapy down in...Is it Letterman hospital down in San Francisco? The veterans’ hospital, the big veterans’ hospital in San Francisco. The other one drove an ambulance in France. I used to lie awake at night trying to think what I could do.

KW: Did you see the Clara Bow movie about movie about a woman who drove an ambulance in France? [laughs]
AB: No, well, at any rate, Ann Pendelton had driven this ambulance in France and I was so envious, of course, they were a lot older than I was, and but I decided then that if I were a nurse and there was another war they always needed nurses in war and that kind of started me. No, I went to college just because I think my family expected to go and they would send me and that sort of thing.

KW: So it was pretty much of an expected thing all of your lives that you would go ahead and—

AB: Yes, neither of my brothers went to college. They both went but neither of them finished, simply because there was not enough money, at least my family didn’t, they sent me and I’m not sure, I think my mother and father helped them but they just dropped out. I mean, they didn’t think it was necessary to take it on. Uncle Herb, who still ran the family and the store, even his son even and his daughter never went to college. They didn’t think it was necessary—that generation. But my mother was determined that girls had to be educated because my mother was a school teacher, you see. She was a normal school graduate, however, she wasn’t a college graduate.

KW: But she did think that it was important for girls as well as boys to get a college education?

AB: Yes, and I didn’t put up any fuss about it.

KW: Was your mother a women’s rights advocate at that time?

AB: No, I don’t think so because, of course, she was, she was a relatively young woman in the days when Jeanette Rankin and those were, were pushing—

KW: Suffrage?

AB: Suffrage in Montana and they were...As a matter of fact, they grew up together. My mother’s sister who was about four years younger than my mother was one of Jeanette Rankin’s close friends. She and Jimmy Mills, who was the other one. There were three of them, Bessie Toddman and Jimmy Mills and Jeanette Rankin, were the three boon companions when they were growing up here in Missoula. But my mother, the reason I knew this, I don’t remember anything about it except that they used to laugh at the Rankins. They didn’t—

KW: Do you mind this being on the tape, Anna? [Laughs]

AB: Well, I think they’d probably—

KW: Know it?

AB: Know it. Principally it was Wellington that they didn’t like, not Jeanette. I mean they never said much about Jeanette, but in those days women that were kind of pushy like Jeanette
They just called her pushy, and they kind of laughed at them—made fun of them. Men did. Years after, after my mother died, I was carrying out some old things and I found this file—one of these extension file things—that had a whole lot of papers in it. My mother’s handwriting was on it so I went though that I didn’t want to throw out anything. Among that was a paper...My mother—and this just shocked me no end—was against women voting.

KW: She was against it?

AB: Yes, she made a speech at the ladies’ aid or something.

KW: At the ladies’ aid?

AB: She had written this out for the thing and she had kept it in there and, my, that just shocked me because, well, women had been voting in Montana...When was it? 1919? Something like that. We sent Jeanette Rankin to Congress in 1916, and women couldn’t vote then. Wyoming was the first state. But at any rate, no, when I was 21 and I could vote, why I voted in the first election that came up.

KW: Did your mother?

AB: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

KW: I think that’s funny. I always—

AB: But she didn’t always vote the way my dad did either.

KW: That’s an interesting thing that she thought it was important for women to go to college and yet she didn’t think they should vote. The combinations of ideas that people have—

AB: But I can’t imagine my mother taking that attitude because that was not like my mother. My remembrance of my mother. My mother would, she was a very kindly person but she was also a boar, you know, and—

KW: She thought people should make up their own minds about things—

AB: And maybe she just thought that was the thing to do. She didn’t want to be laughed at.

KW: Prevents people a lot of times from taking a stance on controversial questions.

AB: Well, anyway. I don’t remember much about it, to tell you the honest truth. Many things went by me, I’ve decided.

KW: But you did decide to go to, you sort of took it for granted that you were going to go on to
college and you assumed that you'd go to the University of Montana, I suppose?

AB: Yes, well actually I think it was the only place I could have gone in terms of finances because, and it was close enough to home so my mother and family. I'd see them and they could supervise things and—

KW: What kind of social life was there for adolescents and teenagers in St. Ignatius in those days? Did you date the way kids do now or—

AB: Yes but there wasn't much else to go, you went, there were dances and things and I didn't do things that, my mother and my family always knew where I was and of course, having two brothers of such, especially one that was such a close age to mine, we often did things together, groups and things you know. And you went maybe with one boy, but it was one of these kind of group things that everybody—

KW: Amoeba [laughs].

AB: Yes. And then I left you see, after I started going to the University I was only home during the summertime and we used to have awfully good times in the summer, picnicking and I was going to say riding, we did riding a little bit but I never liked riding very well. Like going places in the car and we'd have fun at home and that sort of thing...But there was a movie and there was a movie that was on several times a week and they had dances, of course, and they had dance halls. There was one at Polson and I never got to go to those.

KW: Was there a lot of young marriage at that time? A lot of young people that would get married right out of high school or did the young, maybe the girls do it more than the boys, right after high school? What was that situation?

AB: I think so. I know a lot of the girls that were to school when I was married fellows that are out on the Reservation. Now they had there 50-year anniversary in 1968 and they had, they, I graduated in '21, and the first class was 1918 and they even had some five graduates, there were only three of us in my class, but I think they had five of the 1918 class out there and it’s primely because I've been away for so long and just visiting really after I went to Hopkins I came home a lot but I just visited really and then after I came back to Montana to stay I was home a lot but it was still visiting and I'd meet some of them. There were a lot of my brothers and—

KW: So you’re not really sure whether or not they stayed here or moved away?

AB: No, I know there were girls in high school in my days who got babies, had babies that were not married and I—

KW: What happened to them? Did they stay there in St. Ignatius?
AB: The one I knew best was a friend of mine and all and she dropped out of school right away and I knew something was, you see I didn’t even, in those, in that time I didn’t even know how you got babies.

KW: I was going to ask you about that, did the girls know anything about sex education?

AB: No, nobody told us, nobody told us. I don’t know, I think my, actually I think they learned more from other kids than they did from their parents and I used to worry because Mina was a real nice gal and I liked her a lot and there was so much talk about it and whispering and everything I knew something, Mina had done something terrible. Well, then it developed that she was going to have this baby. And I used to lie awake wondering at night how you, what might have did, really and truly.

KW: And you never, it never occurred to you to ask your mother, were you afraid to ask your mother?

AB: It never occurred to me to ask her because we just never talked about things like that. My mother told me about menstruating before I menstruated.

KW: She did?

AB: Long before, yes.

KW: And she didn’t connect that up with having children?

AB: Not to my knowledge. And one time I did ask her one time, we used to see the word F-U-C-K, fuck, on lots of things around, you know, car—

KW: Even in those days?

AB: Oh, yes.

KW: [laughs] I thought it was something that was really recent in the toilets.

AB: In the toilets. We had outdoor toilets at the school and carved on trees, so and so, and so and so here and that sort of thing. I came home one day, and my mother was sewing at the sewing machine, one of those old pedal ones, you know. I hung around for a while because I wanted to find out. I had tried to find the word in a dictionary, but no dictionary that I looked in either at home or at school had that word in it. I said to Mother, “What does fuck mean?”

My mother yelled, scared me almost, “Don’t you let me ever hear you say that word again! That’s a bad word!” Well, my gosh, you wouldn’t ask anything after that that you had any—

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KW: Doubt about.

AB: Doubt about. I knew it was a bad word but I wanted to know what it was [laughs].

KW: That’s interesting because that’s almost exactly the same thing that happened to me. People will be interested to know that in 1913 that word was spread around almost as much as it is now.

AB: Oh, yes.

KW: In bathrooms and...That’s real interesting. So you did know that some girls were having sexual intercourse when they were in high school?

AB: Oh, yes. I think the same things. It’s just like when I was in college, you know, at the University the same things went on then that go on now. There more going to school now and so there’s more of them. But we, you know very well that, we all knew, that there were certain girls that, I lived in the sorority house and there were certain girls that slept around with men and stayed out until the wee small hours and they didn’t even, and that’s when smoking we had women smoking at the University of Montana in those days was terrible. I didn’t smoke in those days until I went to Baltimore and everybody, all women were smoking there.

KW: Well, that was in the mid-‘20s and I suppose that was somewhat more fashionable.

AB: Oh, yes. But at any rate they, they used to talk about in high school, I suppose it went on in high school, too. There’s always a group of people that your mother and father warn you about. Whether they come out openly but there are certain subtle ways that they let you know that those are not nice people to go with.

KW: What would happen to these girls? Would they be pushed off into marriage or would they go off and disappear for a few months?

AB: I know that Mina’s mother and father kept the baby.

KW: Oh, they did. So they didn’t send Mina off to Eastern Montana or somewhere to—

AB: They kept the baby but I don’t know what happened to Mina. She just had to leave town.

KW: After the baby was born.

AB: When everybody knew who the man was. He was old enough to be her father.

KW: Was that pretty much of a tragedy then at that time?
AB: Yes, I would call it a tragedy.

KW: And ruined her life

AB: Because she was, well, I don’t know whether it ruined her life or if she managed to get buy and I don’t know what she made of herself after that.

KW: Was there any abortion in that community?

AB: I don’t know.

KW: Did you ever hear about it before or since?

AB: I never heard of abortions, criminal abortions until I got to a nurse and then I really didn’t know very much because they didn’t bring them to Hopkins, at least I never saw them. But it wasn’t until I was at St. Peter’s Hospital here in Montana. One fall we had four girls that were, one of whom died, that came from that woman in Butte that they never could, that they let go on and on and on for years and never could get her or wouldn’t. They couldn’t find the parents of the girl who would stand up and tell the truth about this. They always wanted to keep...Everybody would know it, but they didn’t want it to go to court. The only way they said they could get rid of her was to take it to court and once, if one...As one doctor said to me in Helena that time, if they could find, I thought I had her mother and father ready to go and then they decided no, she lived, and he said, “You know, if we could get one mother and father and daughter into court to tell this I think we would get a lot of them to support it.” But you never could get that one to make the—

KW: You didn’t see cases in the emergency wards at Johns Hopkins?

AB: Well, it never happened about it when I was there and I never heard much talk about it. You knew about it.

KW: When you were at the University girls didn’t talk about going off to—

AB: I just was—

KW: Or you were tuned out?

AB: I was unaware of anything, the honest truth. I suppose there were and we sort of heard about them but I didn’t, they went right by me. I’ve decided there’s lots of things that went by me when I was growing up.

KW: Was there pressure on you to get married at that time? Would you engage actively in
AB: No, I never, nobody did that but my mother used to talk about her daughter wasn’t... I’d hear her talking to her friends, her daughter wasn’t get married until she was 25. I used to say to myself, “If she wants to.” But I never had nerve enough to say that to Mother. But I never really thought much about it to be perfectly truthful. I never had any especially, especially, I didn’t date very much.

KW: You never had a strong desire or your mother never sat you down and said, “Now, look Anna T...”

AB: No, and I went on for years. I think I was in my 30s, and I remember telling my cousin... I was taking to them. I was visiting them [loud noises]. That parcel post.

KW: That’s the noisiest truck.

AB: Those trucks go to that parcel post. Oh, I was telling my cousins in Chicago one time when I was visiting them, something came up and Deb said something to me that reminded me and I said, “Well, Deb, I got to thinking one day.” Here I was, I was in my 30s, I’m sure, and I don’t know where I... I said I didn’t know where I was going. I was just enjoying what I was doing and everything was rosy. Well, I got to thinking that I had a whole life to live and what did I want to do and if I’d... I didn’t want to go on doing the thing I was doing at that time. I don’t right now remember which one of my... which thing I was doing in my career. I suppose I was supervising or something, and that I’d better prepare myself, and nursing was beginning to change, too. It started after World War One. If I wasn’t going to get married which was all right with me that, and they agreed that that was all right, but that I ought to think about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life and—

KW: That you should do something that you really liked and lived where you wanted to live.

AB: Lived where I wanted to be and that sort of thing, and they agreed with me. But every time I came home my mother would be questioning and wanting to know, very much.

KW: She would want to know who you were dating and that kind of thing you mean?

AB: Actually, I think I was one of the women who may have been afraid of marriage, for all I know. The longer you go and the older you get, the more selfish you get—your own little world—until you get to the point where you just can’t think of accommodating yourself to anybody else, living with you. I’ve lived in a room by myself most of my life. There were a few times where I had a roommate, but very few because I didn’t like it. If I wanted to read at night, which I’ve always adored doing, I did it as a child. My mother would wake up in the middle of the night and see, her bed was so that she could see the light under my door, where there was a reflection or something, anyway. She would come in and open the door, “Anna! Do
you know it’s 2:00 in the morning, and you’ve got to get up and go to school!” [laughs]

KW: So you really think that perhaps you wouldn’t have enjoyed marriage but people...people pretty much left you alone about that and let you...Did your mother keep on asking you up until a certain point?

AB: Oh, yes, my mother told me one time that I was missing a lot and in life and Fran Maclay said that she thought unmarried women missed a lot and she hadn’t had such an easy time but being Fran the way she is and all she made herself a happy life, a real happy life. Now things have gotten better and there, she doesn’t have to worry about money and they don’t have to worry about money and all, they’re going down to have Easter dinner tomorrow with Libby in Denver. They’re leaving tomorrow and be back Tuesday or Wednesday.

KW: Do you think that you might have had to worry more about some of those kinds of things if you had married just because maybe children would have come along and—

AB: Well, I think that I have seen many, I’ve had many, many, many married friends, the good friends and the husband, and I have envied those women and men too who seemed to have found a very, a fulfillment within the marriage. They didn’t always get along. You see them arguing and fighting and getting and come in sometime and you know there well into a big fight going on and I’ve been around were some took place, too. But I’ve also been around some very, very unhappy couples that were often unpleasant to be around. I know what I did to chill their children and so forth and I’ve always been one of those that said that there was, that this business of staying married for the sake for the sake of the children, they’d better get out and get a divorce.

KW: Okay.

[End of Interview]