Diane Sands: Belle Winestine being interviewed August 10, 1977, for the Montana Women’s History Project.

You were born in 1891?

Belle Winestine: ‘91.

DS: ‘91. And in Helena.

BW: In Helena.

DS: Were you delivered at home, or were you born in a hospital?

BW: Oh, babies were always born at home in those days. Yes.

DS: Did a doctor come in, or did your mother have a midwife?

BW: No, a doctor came in, and my mother died a couple of days after I was born from some infection. I weighed eight pounds when I was born, and somehow or other I couldn't take any nourishment. My father got my aunt to come and take care of me and Frieda. Frieda was a year old by that time. I couldn't hold down any nourishment, and after three or four months, I went down to five pounds instead of eight. The doctor said, "Well, don't annoy the poor thing. Let her go, because she'll never pick up again." Just a few years after that the doctor is gone, but here I am. [laughs] My aunt wouldn't give up. She finally got me standing on my feet.

DS: What did she feed you? Do you know?

BW: Finally Mellin’s food, which was a very famous baby food in those days and rather new. After everything she could think of failed, she tried Mellin’s food, and apparently I thrived on it.

DS: Were you allergic to milk?

BW: I have no idea. Nobody had ever heard of "allergicism" before—

DS: People died from it, and that was it.

BW: Yes.
DS: Right. How old was your mother?

BW: Oh, she must have been in her early 20s.

DS: So your aunt raised both you and Frieda? Did your aunt come and live with you, or who raised you? Your father alone?

BW: My father got my aunt and her husband to come and live in Helena, and they took care of us and my father lived with us. Then when I was about four years old—I must have been about, yes, about four years old—my father married again. It was just after that that we saw Helena made the capitol. It had been made the capitol before that, but had been challenged by Anaconda. There was a vote taken, and I understand that—I didn’t know enough about it at the time, but I understand that—the Anaconda people said that they voted all the mules up on Sun River to turn the tide our way, and we won. I remember Frieda and I were out in our front yard—our aunt’s front yard—watching the parade that celebrated that event go past the house. That was just a few weeks after my father had married again, so I must have been about four years old and Frieda must have been about five and a half.

DS: Where did your parents come from?

BW: My parents came from Rumania [Romania], but our stepmother came from Germany. She was very strict and a marvelous housekeeper. Frieda and I seem to be the reaction from all this strict housekeeping. [laughs]

DS: Did your father have any other children?

BW: No, just the two of us.

DS: Just the two of you. What did your father do?

BW: He had the store. We had a store called the New York Dry Goods Company in Helena. In those early days, my father had the idea that the finest name in the world for any store would be New York Store because New York was the ideal of style and fashion. He had been a peddler to begin with. He and a couple of other men peddled.

He stayed largely in Minneapolis and sent goods here, and the other two men took over the peddling part of it. They had an empty store on State Street where they kept their goods and then went out peddling. They’d get a stock of stuff every morning and go out peddling in the country. It wasn’t in the city where they tried this but around the countryside. They kept the shade down in this place and the door locked during the daytime. One day they were—the two men that were here—were looking over the goods to see what they should take out that day, and they had pulled up the shade and left the door unlocked as they went in. A woman came
by, and she said, "Is this a store?" They hesitated a moment, and they said, "Yes." And it became a store. Then my father came out again. He had been here before. He came out again, and they started the store in earnest. After it got going, he sent to Rumania for my mother to come.

DS: They had been married in Rumania?

BW: No, no. He sent for this girl who was either a cousin...I don't know whether she was a first cousin or a second cousin. But I gather she must have been a second cousin, because from what he told me later, he didn't know her so very well. But it was kind of an arranged affair, I think. He sent for her and they were married in Minneapolis, and then came here.

DS: Did she come alone?

BW: Yes.

DS: She took the steamer alone?

BW: Yes. I think he sent the ticket for her or something. I think she must have been quite a person. She was the one that knew all about Shakespeare and had a kind of an intellectual outlook on things that was not very common among the women in those days.

DS: Do you know where she got her education? She must have been—

BW: Well, I don't think they went to school. Now, my father got what little training he had in what they call these Jewish schools. They called them a cheder which meant you went there and you read the Torah and you got a general education besides. Girls weren't allowed, but I know my Aunt Dorah (?), my father's sister—and it must have been my mother also—went to this place. They were allowed to sit on the back seat and not take part in the discussion, but they could listen. I think that's where they got whatever information they got.

DS: Do you have any idea why they would do that? I mean if most girls didn't do it, why they would do that—want to go? Were their parents educated?

BW: No, no. Their parents—at least my father's parents—had been smuggled into Rumania from Russia as just a very tiny child. He must have been just a few years old. In those days in Russia, the Jewish families were all terrified not only by pogroms, but the Russian military force used to go around taking the Jewish youngsters to be trained in convents or in some kind of religious schools there and trained to be soldiers for the army. They would take any boy over eight years old. My great grandparents lived in a little place where they had a sort of a family room and there was a hole in the middle of the floor and a little excavation underneath. When they heard these very peremptory knocking at the door when they weren't expecting it, the children were all hustled down into this hole. It was quickly covered with a board that was
made for it, a rug was put over it in a hurry and the table there, and my grandfather and
grandmother would sit at the table talking to each other. When the soldiers came in, they
would say, "Yes, you can search the house. We have no boys here." The boys were all under the
table in this hole in the floor. When they got through searching, the boys could come out again.

When there were little boys, especially—very small ones—there were arrangements so that...It
was a Jewish arrangement so that there was an organization in Rumania that would receive
those boys if they could be put on a train and gotten across the border some way. But they had
to have a passport of some kind to go on. Each one of my uncles...No, each one of my great
uncles—grand uncles—had to have a different passport in order to get across. They had to buy
these passports at quite a fancy price from people who would come in from other countries
and had no more use for their passport. It means that my grandfather had brothers of different
names when they grew up. So that my grandfather had a passport with the name of Fligelman,
and all of his brothers...Now, how did that happen? No, my father had the passport by the
name of Fliegelman. My grandfather had no last name in Israel. They called him Ysl Bort (?),
which meant Joseph with the Beard. He had a red beard.

After all the children were finally smuggled across and kept in this home for children, then the
great grandparents somehow got passports for themselves and came across and took care of
their children. That's how my grandfather grew up there, and my father and all of his brothers
had the name of Fligelman.

DS: Interesting. So he came to this country—he and his brothers all came to this country—
about the same time?

BW: Yes, after my father got here. My father ran away from home. He was fed up with what
was being done in Rumania and had heard about how you just come to America and pick up
those nuggets from the streets and it was a free country, so you didn't have to pay for anything.
That was their idea of freedom. They got quite a shock when they landed here.

DS: This was what year? Do you know? 1860s?

BW: I thought it was '82 that he told me. 1882. But Frieda has a slightly different memory of it.
All I know is that he told me that when I wrote it up to the paper at the time that they built the
new store downtown, but it was in the 80s. He spent the first several weeks in New York, and
that's a whole story of itself. He and the boy that he ran away with, they landed with about 15
dollars in their pockets, as I remember. Then as soon as they...they got a jobs that were highly
unsatisfactory, and then they moved to Minneapolis. They had originally intended to go to
Minneapolis because quite a number of their friends in Rumania had relatives that had gone to
Minneapolis, and they had a feeling that that was kind of a second home for people from
Rumania.

Belle Winestine Interview, OH 049-068, 069, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library,
University of Montana-Missoula.
So they went to Minneapolis, and that’s where he picked up the first partner that he had and came to...When he was in Minneapolis, he lived in a rooming...in a house. I think he was the only roomer there. He rented a room. The young boy in the family delivered newspapers, and my father paid him a few pennies every day to teach him how to read the newspaper. That’s when he first began to learn English. When he got so that he could read the newspapers, he began to read what was on the signboards on the street. He saw a signboard saying that the railroad needed men to come out West to help them, and they would pay the transportation west as far as Billings. That was as far as the railroad went in those days. They were trying to build the railroad to the western coast, which was quite a fantastic thing.

So my father had saved up a little money. He had been peddling in Minneapolis, and he got on—he and this boy that came with him—got on the train at the appointed place. They each had fortified themselves with, I think, a half a dozen sandwiches that they figured would last them until they got to Billings. When they got on the train, the train stopped at various...Did I tell you all this before?

DS: No.

BW: The train stopped at various stations at meal times, and the...I don’t...I call them passengers—they were all this working crew going West—they got out and went to the restaurant had had meals. But my father and the boy that was with him said they weren’t going to waste their money buying meals at a fancy restaurant. They sat in the train and ate their sandwiches. They didn’t find out until they arrived in Billings that all those meals had been paid for by the railroad. But it didn’t hurt them any.

DS: Were they attracted here in part because there was already a Jewish community of any sort here?

BW: No, no. They had never thought of that, apparently. They just thought it was a sort of "Go West, Young Man" idea.

DS: Land of opportunity.

BW: Yes, yes.

DS: When your mother came out, could she read English? Did she speak English?

BW: Yes. Apparently she had taken some...She must have gone to some school after she grew up. When I say grown up, after she was maybe...Well, I don’t know. Now my Aunt Dorah, who went to this cheder with her, could read English when she came here, and she went to school here in Helena. She went to high school here. So my mother must have had some training. Apparently she could read Shakespeare, because when she married my father—out of her higher learning, out of a respect for her higher learning—some friends in Helena gave her these
four sets of...four volumes of Shakespeare that I had here as a wedding present. I think it was because she knew...Now, where she got that training. I'm not sure.

DS: What was the early Jewish community like here? Were there a lot of Jewish people here by the time you were a child?

BW: Yes, I think there must have been about...I don't know if there were 100 families. Sixty families, maybe.

DS: Were they a Reformed community, or an Orthodox community?

BW: Yes. No, it was a Reformed community. Long before my father came here, there had already been a Jewish...what they called a Benevolent Society. The first thing that a Benevolent Society, a Jewish Benevolent Society, did in any community was to start a cemetery. I had a friend here who used to say the only thing that kept the Jewish community alive was the cemetery. They had to have a place to bury their people, and they couldn't bury them in the other cemeteries. I don't know if they even would want to, but that's what happened. So there was a flourishing community by the time my father came, and the year that I was born in 1891, they built this synagogue on Ewing Street.

Now, who knows all about the Jewish community before 1980 is Patty Dean [Patricia L. Dean] here in town who wrote her thesis to graduate from Carleton College [Carroll College, Helena] on the Jewish community in Helena [The Jewish Community of Helena, Montana: 1866-1900, 1977]. She has a...She did a lot of research on it. Then also this...I think, did Norman say her name was Delores? Yes, Lori Morrow [Delores J. Morrow] who works at the State Historical Library. She’s doing a thesis on it, I think, for a master’s [Voice from the Rocky Mountains: Helena’s Pioneer Jewish Community 1864-1899, 1981]. I'm not sure. Both of those girls are very well informed, if you ever should want to get any information from them. Norman is very well informed on it. If you want to talk to him, he can tell you a great deal about it.

Just in the last few weeks, we have had people from the East—it's just surprising—coming back here to look up their roots. Their ancestors had been pioneers out here. One couple from New York that we just got a letter from today and one from Philadelphia who were out here just about a week ago. They found a lot of information, and Norman was out at the Historical Library with them showing them what was available and taking them to the courthouse to look up court records and things. They found a lot that they never realized existed but which tuned in with what they were doing.

It's astonishing how people have suddenly begun looking at their roots. I don't think it's just because this black man had gotten out this book just recently, but I think he's kind of an emblem of this whole system—this whole impulse—to look up your roots.
DS: It’s a lot to say about who you are and what you think you can do and where your family comes from and your sense of yourself. It certainly does.

BW: Yes. Yes. I sometimes wonder if it’s because of this terrific turmoil all over the world today. If that has driven people to search out their roots and cling to them.

DS: Partly probably because we’re so transient, constantly moving?

BW: I can remember when I had my first ride on an airplane. This has really nothing to do with this, but I went to Los Angeles on one of the very early planes there were. I think it was an eight-passenger plane, and the pilot sat in the same room with the passengers. There was no wall between—

DS: What year was this? In the ‘20s, ‘30s?

BW: No, it was later. Yes, it must have been in the ‘20s. My mother was living in Los Angeles at the time, and I went down there to see her. I was the only one on the plane as far as Idaho. We stopped in Idaho and three men got on, each with a bottle of whiskey. I think they were so terrified that they needed a little fortification. They sat down in back of me—I was in the front seat—and they offered me some whiskey, and I said, no thank you, I didn’t feel I needed any. But they were drinking their whiskey, and it was dark by that time and I remember all night I sat with my foot across the aisle so that if they suddenly decided they could take over the plane and do a better job than the pilot, they’d fall over my foot and never get to the pilot. Then we had to make a forced landing somewhere because I think the communication system, whatever it was, gave out. I remember that when I got to Los Angeles, I said to my mother, “If there’s such a thing as reincarnation, I want to be a tree with my roots firmly in the ground. I don’t want to fly anymore.” I think this feeling for roots in the ground is a very reassuring thing and I wonder if that’s what’s making all these people today feel that they must look up their ancestors and get a firmer footing.

DS: I think you’re right. I think that’s a real...the way it is. I think it’s a good analysis of it. People feel real insecure, real unsure about where they came from or where they’re going or what’s going on at the moment. (unintelligible) a direction.

BW: And how to think about things!

DS: I think it’s real important in terms of our...like in terms of the whole suffrage movement. It’s real important to younger women to know that there are women your age who worked for rights for women and equality for women for...It’s been going on for at least a hundred years, and it’s not something that just happened now but it’s a long tradition of people struggling for equality. That’s real important. It’s real important to meet someone like you who’s a real role model for that and who’s still interested in it.
BW: Long before my day, there were women doing it.

DS: That's a matter of roots, for sure.

BW: As far as I'm concerned, it wasn't a matter of feeling that I was in a woman's movement. I don't think that ever dawned on me. But just a feeling that everybody should have a chance, and not have a chance to get a job or do this or that but a chance to do something for the world and for your community. I can remember in the '30s—I maybe have told you this before—I was running for the Senate—the State Senate—the Children's Bureau in the state set up at that time needed money very badly to do some projects that they had in mind to do. You couldn't get our Lewis and Clark County senator to vote for anything of that kind. I had been lobbying for a long time for all these things—lobbying in the legislature—and finally I decided that the only way to get the Children's Bureau going on the things that I thought they ought to be doing, was to be a member of the Senate myself. So I ran for the Senate.

As I rang doorbells, campaigning, women would come to the door...It was in the Depression years. Women would come to the door, and I would tell them that I hope they'd vote for me, that I wanted to do such and such things and see that they got done. They said, "Well, what do you need a job for? You have a husband to support you. All these farmers who are running for this job, or for jobs in the legislature"—not this particular one—"have just lost all their crops in the drought of the last year, and the Depression had set them back so that they have nothing. They need these jobs."

I kept saying, "Oh, this isn't a job! Being a member of the legislature is not a job. It's an opportunity to do something for the country." Well, they couldn't see it. I did run and I won the primary, but I didn't win the final election. This man who'd been serving for about 20 years before and never would do anything, won the election.

I think today and whether...I don't know why it is, but I'm hoping that today people look at these government jobs as an opportunity, rather than a job to earn money. Because after all, somebody's got to have a vision of what has to be done, not just to earn their living.

DS: What was your vision of what suffrage would do?

BW: Well, we had a regular program in the suffrage days. We wanted certain tightened inspection of food, for instance, for the household. And certain advances—changes—made in the educational system, and things that would help the community. Now the men were interested in railroads going through the country, which were necessary, and building bridges and doing all the agricultural projects and the cattle raising. They were all important, but I think the things that women had in mind were so different and so also necessary, that we all felt that the women's point of view ought to be part of the government. As I say, the first thing we did when we got the vote was to get equal guardianship.
DS: Was that before the vote in this state or after?

BW: No, the first thing we got right after we got the vote in 1914 in the following legislature, we got the equal guardianship law.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
BW: I don't know if it's true, but the story was that under the old law, it would have been possible for a man to will away his unborn child. Now whether that ever was actually a case or not, I don't know. Why they would have brought it up if it hadn't been attempted.

DS: It had been done. Men would, like, leave their children to their brothers or leave them to someone else's care besides the mother, so they could—

BW: Now, why he would want to make a will before his child was born when he apparently was in good health, I don't know. That's what puzzles me.

DS: Even his children who were born he could then give away to someone else upon his death. They could fall under somebody else's control, but not the woman's. She may never see them again.

BW: But whether it ever happened, I don't know.

DS: It did happen.

BW: We got the impression, I remember in those days that it had happened and should never happen again. That's why we put this law through.

DS: That's interesting that you say that because that is the first thing that women pushed for in the 1930s and '40s with that whole married women's legal rights. The big part of it was that getting to be a guardian and have your property in your own name.

BW: Yes.

DS: You didn't see that that was a primary interest of men's.

BW: That's right. I don't think it ever occurred to men that it was necessary or important. The other thing that we did in that first legislature was to get the legislature to pass a resolution favoring the child labor amendment in Congress. We were the second state in the Union to do that. Later, it was somehow or other passed without the necessity of having a majority. It was passed in Congress as a regular bill instead of a constitutional amendment. I think that's what happened.

DS: So you supported a whole series of protective legislation for women and children in work situations?

BW: Yes. Then we got this home down in the valley for recalcitrant girls.
DS: The Florence Crittenton Home?

BW: No, no. Not the Florence Crittenton. These were girls that were involved much more critically than merely having babies. They were girls who’d gotten into all kinds of trouble—criminal troubles or were heading for criminal troubles. We got the legislature to back the building of this home. Before that the girls and the boys were both put at Miles City, and the women in this organization—and apparently a lot of other women that weren’t in the organization—were convinced that the girls ought to be separate from the boys. I understand now that they’re going to put them back again. I don’t know just...Times have changed! But anyhow, we got them to build this thing. We brought a woman out from upstate New York, I think it was...Or was it New Jersey? I can’t think of her name right now, but she had been running a very successful home for girls of this type. She came out and we got her an audience with the legislature, and they built this home after that.

Then another thing we did—

DS: Which organization...This is the Montana Suffrage Organization...suffrage clubs?

BW: Well, as soon as we got the vote, it was no longer a Suffrage Organization, it was what we called the Good Government Club. It was very loosely organized. I mean, I don’t think anybody ever took out a membership, but you just said you wanted to get certain things done and everybody that was in sympathy with it just joined them.

So we got this place built, and we got a lot of other things done. I’m trying to think. There was something else that was...Oh, and then we got the Children’s Bureau under some other name—I don’t remember what—established. What became the Children’s Bureau here had started out as the Child and Animal Protection Bureau, and it was the head of the Child and Animal Protection Bureau who used to escort these girls from various parts of the state down to Miles City. I remember Dr. Dean [Dr. Maria Dean], who was a very active suffragist and a very wonderful woman, got the idea that these girls should not be escorted by the man who was escorting the dogs to the pound and things like that. I think it was in that first legislature after we got the vote, we got the thing changed, so that there would be a definite Children’s Bureau that would have nothing to do with the animals.

DS: The W.C.T.U. [Woman’s Christian Temperance Union] during that period, too, was one of the big pushes that they had was to get women matrons at all levels of institutions that handled women. That these young women wouldn’t be escorted by a man, but that there would be a woman present.

BW: Yes.

DS: That was apparently fairly difficult to get.
BW: I think that came a little bit later.

DS: Like 1912, '14, '16, somewhere. It's before World War One, but it's a long campaign to do that anyway.

BW: It could have been ‘14, ’15. The legislature meets in odd years. It could have been in the 1915 legislature just after we got the vote. Then, of course, the big thing that we did with our vote in 1916, which was the first vote we had...These things were accomplished after we had achieved the vote but hadn't had any use for it yet, but we could, except of threatening use. But the first actual votes that we cast ourselves sent Jeannette Rankin to Congress. It was really a sort of thank you vote to her for giving us the vote, and—

DS: But did she give you the vote? Didn't you earn it yourselves? How early did you get involved in it? You were one of the people who worked very hard for suffrage.

Yes, in 1914. That was when Jeannette Rankin organized the state and was the head of the campaign. I feel sure that if it hadn't been for her organization and the wonderful sense of organization that she had and her wonderful personality as she went around all over the state in every possible community—I think if it wasn't for her— we shouldn't have had suffrage for some years to come.

DS: How do you see the way that the W.C.T.U. and the suffrage clubs interacted? Was that a friendly relationship?

BW: Well, I always felt there was a little tension between the two, and I may be entirely wrong. There were a lot of very darling W.C.T.U. women who were very openly suffragists as pure suffragists. But the W.C.T.U., of course, at that time was working against the liquor interests, and the liquor interests were working against suffrage because they thought all of us were working against them. I think it meant that there was tension between the suffragists and the W.C.T.U.s, although the W.C.T.U.s were definitely for suffrage because it was the only way they could get what they wanted.

DS: Were you pro the Temperance Act?

BW: Yes. That year...I don't know whether it was a...Well, I feel that it was not entirely a moral impulse for the suffrage organization or for Jeannette to back the Temperance women, but it was a political exigency, so to speak. Now, in the primaries, I remember, I think it was Governor Ford, who was then running for Attorney General, he got a big, overwhelming vote in the state, and he was very earnestly pro-W.C.T.U. I think he was the only one on the ticket—on either ticket—that had actually come out publicly as supporting them. I think that kind of alerted the whole political organization on both sides to say they were for prohibition and for the W.C.T.U.
DW: Do you think temperance was a women’s issue, and if so, why? What was the point of temperance for, say, ordinary women? Why did they support that?

BW: I think many of the ordinary women who were for suffrage—and I don’t know that they were so ordinary, I think they were probably doing a very handsome job—they had had so much experience either with drunken husbands or friends who had drunken husbands. Now, I know that they just felt that something had to be done. I remember there was one darling woman here in town who was a strong W.C.T.U.er and a strong suffragist. The one I had in mind when I spoke of her before. She said she was walking along the street in Billings one day, and she saw a drunken driver drive a car right up onto the sidewalk and kill a man that was just walking along the sidewalk. From then on she became a W.C.T.U.er. I think a lot of people who must have seen that same incident would have felt exactly the same way.

I tell you, today, I feel quite astonished when I hear all this talk against marijuana. I think it’s so much more important to have laws against alcoholics driving than it is against marijuana smokers, because when a marijuana person smokes, he probably destroys himself and if he does it for a long enough time, probably a trial isn’t going to hurt him any except to get him into the habit, maybe, who knows, but all he destroys is himself. But a drunken driver destroys everybody—potentially destroys everybody on the street. I think it’s much more important, and yet it’s very hard to convict a drunken driver. Then as soon as he pays his fee or gets out of jail, or whatever the penalty is, he is allowed to go back and drive again. I have a feeling that once a man has killed another...Well, not killed, but let us...Once he’s killed another man, he should never drive again. Whether he should be free or not, I don’t know, but once a drunken man has run into anybody on the street or on a road, he should have his license taken away and never be allowed to drive. Or I’ll say, let him try once more, but certainly the second time he should never be allowed to drive.

I read in the papers that it’s so-and-so’s third incident like this or fourth incident. Nobody has a right to give him the chance to run down people if he’s going to drink some more.

DS: It’s real understandable why a lot of women were—and a lot of men—were pro temperance.

BW: Yes! Now I never joined the W.C.T.U. that I remember, although I read articles in some of these early papers that say I did—I don’t remember actually joining them—but I was certainly in sympathy with this sort of thing because an awful lot of damage had been done.

DS: Were you at all familiar or did you know any of the people like Maggie Smith Hathaway?

BW: Oh, did I know Maggie Smith! Maggie Smith and I spoke out of the same car one day down on Main Street—an open-top car. Yes! And did you ever read Maggie Smith’s book?
DS: Yes, I have. *Maggie from Montana*. 

BW: *Maggie from Montana*. I understand...well, I won't go into that. But anyway, she was very earnestly for suffrage, and very earnestly for...I think she was first W.C.T.U. and then suffrage. But very earnestly for both of them. But I felt in reading her book that there was a terrible antagonism going on with her and she, in her way, was a pioneer school teacher. She was County Superintendent for years.

DS: It sounds as though in some ways that she felt that Jeannette Rankin had—in being elected to Congress—gotten a certain amount of acclaim that she—in spite of her great deal of work that she'd done for suffrage as well—hadn't received that kind of acclaim.

BW: One gets that from the book. Very definite. I hadn't realized it until I read the book fairly recently.

DS: And that's part of the reason why she ran for the legislature.

BW: Yes, she says in the book that when Jeannette asked her if she would help her, be a campaign manager or help her in the campaign, she says frankly, “I said, “No” and hung up, but it gave me the idea of running for the Senate.”

DS: Which was a good thing in itself. I think it's great that given the immediacy of the vote immediately these women all decided to run for these different offices.

BW: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DW: She was quite an effective person in the state.

BW: So she really did a lot of good, and it's too bad that there has to be a certain amount of bitterness, I suppose, in all political campaigns.

DS: Maybe part of its people now looking back on it don't realize how much the W.C.T.U. contributed towards suffrage as well. That it was a lot of different organizations that worked for that issue.

BW: That's right. That's right.

DS: And not just suffrage. Did you know Ingalls [Emma Ingalls]? She's from Kalispell. She also ran for the legislature.

BW: Mrs. Ingalls. Yes, and She was elected. She and Maggie were the first ones, I think. But she didn't run for re-election, and Maggie did and did get re-elected.
DS: I was just reading some correspondence when I was in Kalispell last week between Emma Ingalls and Carrie Chapman Catt. There was quite a bit of correspondence up there about—

BW: Oh, that's interesting!

DS: —about getting Montana to be one of the very first states, like within 24 hours, to ratify the federal suffrage amendment.

BW: Oh, is that right?

DS: Right.

BW: That's another thing...another person whose vote counted...I think it was a majority of one vote needed for that two-thirds majority, and La Guardia [Fiorello H. La Guardia] sent—wired—his vote home from Europe. He was in Europe during the war and yet was a part of Congress. I'm not quite sure how this happened. His vote would have made the difference, and he wired back to Congress that he was for it.

DS: Right. Were you in the state when Carrie Champman Catt came out and came through and gave speeches and sort of rah-rah-rahed suffrage?

BW: There seems to be some error somewhere, and I got the idea from this book, that that Carrie Chapman Catt was the head of the national suffrage organization at the time. She wasn't. She had been for some years before we got the suffrage, then Anna Howard Shaw came in and I think she was in for maybe four or five years, I don't remember just how long. But she was in when we got suffrage, but by the time Jeannette got elected, Carrie Chapman Catt was back again, because she presided at this breakfast the morning that Congress opened.

DS: Were you at that breakfast?

BW: No.

DS: Alice Paul was also there—the head of the National Women’s Party. Were you familiar with her at all? Had you met her? What was that working relationship?

BW: I was familiar with her. There was—and I don't think it's ever been spoken of and I don't know if it should be—but there was a little antagonism between Jeannette and Mrs. Catt, too, and Alice Paul, because Alice Paul had been in London and gotten a whole new technique on this thing.

DS: Militancy.
BW: Militancy. I really think that if it hadn’t been for Alice Paul’s militancy, that the polite women’s suffrage organization would never have attained the respectability it did except by contrast with Alice Paul. I think that had a lot to do with it—with the passage of it.

DS: Were people out here pretty familiar with her techniques?

BW: Oh, the papers were full of it, of course. Though, after seeing what they did to Jeannette on that first vote, you don’t trust the papers anymore. But I can remember that year when I was in Washington with Jeannette in 1917, Alice Paul had a headquarters that was very, very exciting—

DS: About a block away. Right next to the Capitol.

BW: Well, very near the Capitol. Very near the White House, not the Capitol. It was around the corner from the White House. Every afternoon when the weather was good—it happened to be good that summer while I was there mostly—I used to go down about half past three or quarter of four in the afternoon to stand across the street from the White House and watch Alice Paul’s parade come down the street with their banners fluttering in the wind. These women were all dressed in white with yellow “Votes for Women” bands, and each one carrying a banner with a quotation from the United States Constitution, which for some reason was illegal and they could arrest them for quoting the constitution—at least they did it. They would come down at four o’clock every afternoon that summer—at least the few times I went down —and they billowed down this...Was it 16th Street or was this 16th Street? They turned the corner and marched in front of the White House on the sidewalk—it was a public thoroughfare. The police patrols were already there to tell them that they were obstructing traffic. They slammed them into the police patrols and took them out to Occoquan [Occoquan Workhouse], the women’s prison, and treated them like dirt out there.

There was one of the times when they were going to be tried. They were in prison for several days or a week or so and then they were to come up for trial in the courthouse—in one of the courthouses in Washington. I went there to see what they were going...what was going to be at this hearing, at this court case. Sitting next to me before the court convened was a black woman, and she said to me, “What are you here for?”

I said I was here for the suffragists.

She said, “Well, I’m here, my daughter got into trouble, and she’s going to be tried this morning.” Or she told me that first and then said what are you going to be here for.

I said, “I’m here to watch—to see about—what they’re going to do with the suffragists.”

She said, “Take it from me, honey, those women made up their minds, and when a woman makes up her mind, she’s the determinedest thing there is.” And she was.
DS: She was right. Did you ever happen to see the times that Alice Paul’s women were chaining themselves to the White House or any of that?

BW: No, no. I think that was after I left. But Jeannette and I went out to Occoquan, to the prison, to see what was happening to these women and to get an interview with them, if possible, to see what we could do to help. Before we were escorted into the prison, we were taken through the prison grounds to show how beautiful it was, and there was a big storehouse and they showed us the pounds of butter in refrigeration and the cream and the fresh eggs and what-not. Then they took us in to interview these women. We learned afterwards that all this storehouse of full of stuff was sold to the grocers in Washington, and the women were eating bread with worms in it and gruel with worms in it and what not. Not only the suffragists, but all the women were just—before they were even tried to see if they were guilty—were treated like dirt. Recently reading about what happened in Occoquan, apparently they got just kicked—actually, physically kicked and stepped on and heaven knows what. But I’ll never forget that visit.

DS: Did Jeannette Rankin ever say anything about Alice Paul, or did you feel there was any sort of personal antagonism?

BW: No, no. We very carefully—and Alice Paul very carefully—were silent about each other.

DS: Alice Paul was one of the few people that came out who was involved in suffrage...Let’s go back. Alice Paul, while some of the national women’s suffrage associations thought that Jeannette Rankin’s voting against World War One would reflect negatively on women, Alice Paul came out very strongly and supported her voting against World War One. Is that not true?

BW: I’m under that impression. I don’t remember definitely, and it was an important thing to remember. I should have. But I think Alice Paul would have supported Jeannette in that thing. Mrs. Catt was, I think, outraged. I think all of the old suffragists said that Jeannette was setting the national suffrage bill back 20 years by taking that stand that she was just showing that women were sentimental and couldn’t stand up to what was going on in the world.

DS: That’s what many of them said. Do you think they felt that in some ways that Alice Paul set back suffrage in some ways? She just passed away about two weeks ago.

BW: Yes. Oh, I think Mrs. Catt felt that...Well, no, I have no business to talk for Mrs. Catt. But I have a feeling that the whole polite suffrage organization felt that Alice Paul was a very degrading element of suffrage, that she was unladylike and doing things that would just antagonize the opposition.

DS: How did you feel about that? How did you feel about her tactics?

Belle Winestine Interview, OH 049-068, 069, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BW: Well, I'm one of those people that could take both sides and relish what they were both doing. [laughs]

DS: Some of the tactics that you used out here weren't exactly ladylike, according to most people's standards, anyway, were they? Going and talking in front of the bars in Augusta, et cetera.

BW: Well, the only things we did were street speaking—making street speeches—which were supposed to be unladylike. But we didn't do anything like—

DS: —getting thrown in jail.

BW: —for instance, Alice Paul's people, I understand—and I didn't see this—went to Congress when the suffrage vote was on and had literature up their skirts, which the guards couldn't see, and they'd pull them out and drop them down. That was supposed to be very outrageous.

DS: Had you heard about what was happening in England with suffrage?

BW: Oh, yes, yes. I think, we all felt that they were being more militant then they should be, but I can see now that it was the only way they could have gotten anything. You know, they now have a statue of Mrs. Pankhurst [Emmeline Pankhurst] out in back of the British Museum, in the garden there. I picked a very beautiful weed and put it on her statue when I was there. [laughs]

DS: A very beautiful weed. She would have liked that, yes.

BW: Because I think that she was a very great force for women. Did you see on the TV a few weeks ago—

DS: The whole series?

BW: Yes.

DS: Yes.

BW: It was very interesting.

DS: There's a whole book on that now too. It's called Shoulder to Shoulder [1974], and it includes all the original material and pictures. It's really an interesting book.

BW: It should be.

DW: I think a lot of younger women now are just starting to realize how much people had to pay for the vote, I mean that it wasn't an easily gotten thing at all.
BW: You’d think by the way these women at the IWY conference [International Women’s Year] here in Helena behaved, that it was nothing at all, and that they would better not to have done it.

DS: That’s true. Did you remember then the introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923?

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
BW: —and I can remember seeing a jury sitting from there in the courtroom and the prosecuting attorney had them all convinced—just beautifully convinced...Now wait a minute, no. It was the defense attorney had them beautifully convinced that the man was okay and shouldn’t be arrested, but the prosecuting attorney got up—Andy McConnell—and he said...These men in the jury who looked a little bit sleepy and they weren’t terribly interested at all, but they were being paid to sit there and listen. Andy McConnell got up—he was the County Attorney—and he said, "Gentlemen of the jury, you have just heard the most eloquent speech ever made on behalf of a lost cause." As soon as he said "lost cause," you could see these men all changing their minds, their faces suddenly lit up and they were listening all of a sudden. He was such a good orator that nobody would ever fall asleep while he talked, and the man lost the case. I said to myself at that time, these aren’t the kind of people that ought to be on a jury. From then on...Oh, this was back in 1914. From then on, I was...it took me an awful long time—

DS: 1939 is quite a long time—

BW: Yes.

DS: —before you’re allowed to be on a jury.

BW: —to fight for that. When we finally—in 1939—we finally got the bill through the committee at the legislature and they were going to discuss it. One of the legislators in the House got up and said, "You don’t"—to the members of the legislature—"You don’t have to do anything about this bill. It isn’t an important bill, and we can just vote it right down now." He says, "There’s nobody in the state—no woman in the state—wants to sit on a jury except Mrs. Winestine." I was just thunderstruck. I went right to the office of...I can’t think of her name. She was, I think, the state secretary for the Federated Women’s Clubs in the state, but she had a job in the capitol. I went right up to her office, and we talked it over and we decided to send a telegram to every women’s club in Montana to get a telegram out to their—as many telegrams as they could—out to their legislators the very next morning saying they wanted women on the jury. The telegrams flooded in, and we got women on the jury.

I can remember a few...About a week or two after that, I went to the women’s club luncheon. I wasn’t a member of it, but I had been invited to their luncheon and a woman from upstate came in. We were introduced to each other, and she didn’t get my name and I didn’t quite get her name. I said to her, “We’ve just been talking about women on the jury.”

She said, "Yes, and that Mrs. Winestine, who thinks she got it through all by herself. She thinks she’s the only one that’s been fighting for this. Thinks she owns the whole thing."

It suddenly dawned on me what this poor woman was saying. I said to her, "Well, you know, I don’t think Mrs. Winestine thinks that at all. She knows that all of the thinking women in the
state were behind this. And that the women's clubs helped a great deal. It could never have
gone through without the women's clubs." All the people standing around us—all the women
who'd been at the luncheon—were just so silent you could have heard a pin drop. Then I just
said goodbye to them and went out. Afterwards they must have told her what she had done,
and the curious thing was that this woman and I became fast friends after that. Every time she
came to town, we'd have lunch together. [laughs]

DS: That's wonderful. How long did it take after the bill was passed in the legislature that you
were on the foreman of this grand jury?

BW: I think it was that same year.

DS: Oh, they put you right to work.

BW: No, wait a minute. It meets in January and February. I think it was the fall or summer of
that same year.

DS: So you don't think that all of the things that you set out to do in working for suffrage have
been accomplished yet? Or do you? Do you think that all of the things—

BW: Well, I think working for suffrage was just opening the door for all of the things that are
going to come in the future for women to accomplish for the world. I think more and more it's
getting to be not only just women, but it's going to be men and women working together. I
don't think all the good things were thought up by women any more than they were by men,
but I think, I think it needs some working together. Now, I was at a meeting for a...I think it was
at the women's caucus, but I'm not sure. I was at this meeting one night, just before a primary
election here, and they were talking about voting for certain candidates. One woman got up
and said, "We have to realize that whether a woman has had experience for a job and knows
what it's about before she goes there, she'll learn afterwards. I think it's every woman's duty to
vote for a woman candidate instead of a man just to get people used to seeing women in public
office." I sat there for a minute or two boiling—and boiling, and finally I got up—and I wasn't a
member of it, I had just been invited as a guest—and I said, "I think it's a mistake to vote for
anybody unless we know they're qualified and better qualified than the other candidate. I think
we ought to vote for either a man or woman candidate if it's the best qualified person."

DS: Well, as we've seen with the International Women's Year, some women we'll vote against
are not pro-women's equal rights—

BW: Yes. Yes.

DS: —and there are men that certainly are.
BW: In a few minutes quite a number of other women got up and said they felt the same way. Because if you’re going to...I said I don’t think we have any right to get men used to seeing incompetent women in public offices. If they’re going to get used to it, they get used to seeing the best qualified people, and there are plenty of qualified women that could do these things.

DS: One thing with the International Women’s Year that struck me is that it really has a predecessor—and it ties in with Jeannette Rankin—is that International League of Peace and Freedom that organization that she went over to Europe.

BW: What we called the WILPFs.

DS: The WILPFs. Right. And I think that organization—that whole idea—really comes from there of women from all of these different countries getting together, even though the politics of the countries may be somewhat different and working for common women’s issues.

BW: Yes.

DS: I was really thinking of that when we were talking about International Women’s Year, is I think it started back with a lot of that. Were you at all interested in that organization?

BW: Oh, yes. They had a meeting here once.

DS: Here?

BW: In Helena at the Placer Hotel. Not the International, but the local group and a few from out of the state. I think the national officers came and talked that night.

DS: In the ’20s?

BW: It was in the ’20s. It was a small meeting. I doubt if there were more than 20 or 30 people there in a room in the Placer—in a meeting room. I remember getting up at that meeting and saying—they were talking about world peace or something—I said I thought instead of each nation having an army to kill off each other nation, that we should have an international police force. I remember I was told afterward that I shouldn’t have said that because people weren’t ready for that, and it didn’t sound quite nice.

DS: But you feel that it’s really important that Jeannette Rankin came out against World War One?

BW: Oh, absolutely. I think that is the best thing. She did an awful lot of things in that first session, but I think that the important thing—the most important thing—that she did was that first vote against war.
DS: Did you grow up with the idea that war was something to be avoided and there were other ways to solve problems (unintelligible)?

BW: No. I think we all were instilled with patriotism from the very beginning regardless of what happened. I can remember during the Spanish American War sitting on our front porch—I must have been about eight years old—and I was embroidering a sofa cushion with a picture of Dewey on it and wondering why we should lean against a pillow with Dewey's face on it. But it was the patriotic thing to do in those days. Everything had a little something to do with the war.

DS: So at some point it was patriotic not to be pro-war?

BW: No. I don't think it ever occurred to me to be against war until I was well grown up.

DS: There was a lot of support in the state for Jeannette Rankin and for that whole—not just for her—but for all of the people who voted against World War One. Particularly Scandinavians, right?

BW: Well, you see the year of her election, President Wilson was running on the slogan, he kept us out of the war. Of course, Jeannette was running on an anti-war slogan too—an anti-war platform. Although the President changed his mind, and I can see why he changed his mind with all the American ships being sunk after he got elected. But what I think is so pitiable is that we have what we call great men in all of the governments—at least theoretically they're the greatest that can be summoned in each country—and they can't seem to come down to the fact that they could reason these things out sitting around a table just as well before they kill off the population as after. The people that they kill have no more to do with what makes the war than the man in the moon. It just seems a terrible waste of manpower.

I can remember once in Jeannette's office we had an extra battery of about six or eight elderly spinsters sitting around a table addressing envelopes that had to be of some kind of agricultural papers that had to be sent out over the state, and we needed help—extra help—and all these women were spinsters. Jeannette said to me, "If it hadn't been"—they were quite elderly, too, and Jeannette said—"if it hadn't been for the Civil War, all of these women would have had husbands."

I thought after that, we kill off all of the men—of course now they say we're going to kill off the women too—I am bold enough to say why should we kill only one of them if we're going to kill off men and women. Let's shoulder our responsibility in this thing. Personally, I don't think they're going to have women on the firing line. I just can't believe they would, though they do in Israel. And in other countries. I think anybody—man or woman—who feels strongly enough about the causes that are at stake in the war, should be willing to give their lives for it. I think that anybody who doesn't know what the war is all about, should not be drafted to be killed without having any idea what they're giving their lives for. There were millions of them. I think if they have both men and women in the war, it will equalize the population.

Belle Winestine Interview, OH 049-068, 069, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
DS: It may also stop the war a lot faster.

BW: I think so. I think so.

DS: So you were involved somewhat then with that International League of Peace and Freedom. Well, just that I went to that meeting that night. We didn’t have a regular organization here in Helena for it, but we got enough people together to call a meeting.

DS: How strong was the...I mean I’ve read a lot of newspaper articles that went on about how, following World War One, how Jane Addams and Jeannette Rankin didn’t have a right to make comments about the peace treaty since they had opposed the war. Was that feeling pretty strong out here as well as nationally?

BW: I don’t really know anything about the legality of that thing.

DS: It was a New York Times editorial.

BW: What is that?

DS: It was a New York Times editorial saying that they didn’t have the right to comment. Implying, really, that they had been traitors.

BW: Well, I can see how it could be...how the Times could say this. But the feeling of 1,001 percent patriotism was so strong in Montana and all over the country, that you could see the sentiment was all the other way—all for war. I remember even in the...Well, after Jeannette's first vote against the war, they didn't want to have much to do with her here in Montana. They were just horrified.

In the Second World War, I was in Helena when she voted against the Second World War—had no connection with her at all at that time—but I went down on the street that next morning and people would stop me on the street just absolutely outraged, “How could Jeannette cast a vote like that? How could she betray us like that?” Well, I wasn't responsible, but I think that she did the right thing. I don't say that we shouldn't have declared war when the thing was done in that particular tricky way that it was done. But I think that Jeannette’s vote against war at that time will be thought of in years to come as a possibility that this thing could be settled without war. Not that it was the right thing to do. Everybody thought if you voted against war, you meant it was the right thing for the aggressor to do. I think her idea was not that it was...I know she didn’t think it was the right thing to do because it was with arms and power that they did this thing, but I think it was just another way of saying—of her saying—that there’s a different way to settle this. Now, I'm not sure that there was under those circumstances. I’m not at all sure that there was, but I think it was nice to have one vote at least believing that the
time would come in the future that we would be more rational than we are today. I just have that feeling.

DS: It certainly was courageous. I know I read all of the Congressional Record for that whole vote and how she was not allowed to speak and interrupted. Must have been really frightening with all of that pressure against you and so many people so angry about it.

BW: Of course, it was the only vote against it. I can see their side of it, and it took an enormous amount of courage because she knew it then and she knew when she cast her first vote that it was going to reflect on all the women of the United States and that it was against all public policy and public thinking.

She said to me once, very much later, when she was quite well on in years—I think she was in her 80s—she said she just wishes she could be elected to Congress once more, she’d like to cast three votes against war. [laughs]

DS: She could have voted against Vietnam.

BW: Yes.

DS: She did. I think that’s quite amazing.

BW: I remember in that...when she had that interview with Senator Mansfield, when they had that big demonstration about Vietnam—that women’s demonstration—she said, “I think that the boys ought to be brought home right away.”

Mansfield said to her, “How would you go about that?”

She said, “Put them on airships and bring them home.” [laughs]

DS: [laughs] The most direct way.

I just was really impressed by that whole organization. It surprised me also that that march on Washington was the one that really...that prior to that, it had been illegal for groups to gather in groups of more than three or four on the Capitol grounds, and that that whole march pushed some sort of public law through that you could peaceably assemble on the United States Capitol Grounds. I had no idea that that was illegal up until that point—up to 1968, ’67, whenever that was. That’s incredibly late. That’s really amazing.

BW: Yes, yes.

DS: How did World War One affect you personally? That’s when you met your husband, right? He was working in Washington D.C.?
BW: Yes, I found him in Washington working for the Hoover department—the food [U.S. Food Administration].

DS: You found him?

BW: Yes. [laughs] Well, and he found me. We got together, and we were both working for a peaceful part of the war as far as that’s concerned, if you call feeding soldiers a peaceful part of the war.

I was only with Jeannette for one year. She had this contract to write a syndicated article for the *Chicago Herald*, and I was to write the article each week.

DS: You were the ghost writer?

BW: Yes, and when that contract was up, then I left because by that time her sister had come—

DS: Which sister? Edna?

BW: No, Hattie. Harriet [Harriet Rankin Sedman McGregor]. She had come with her two children. Her husband had died the week—the first week—that the session had started, and she brought her two children to Washington. Then she took over the running of the office after the first year. She was a very competent person.

DS: Did you also know Edna Rankin [Edna Rankin McKinnon]?

BW: Oh my, yes! I knew her very well. She lives down in Carmel [California].

DS: Were you at all familiar with her work with Margaret Sanger and the whole planned parenthood-birth control movement?

BW: Yes, and I read this book that was written about her. Did you see the book?

DS: Yes, *Too Many People...Too Many People...*

BW: *Too Many People and Too Little Love*, something like that, it was called. [*Too Many People and Too Little Love: Edna Rankin McKinnon – Pioneer for Birth Control, 1974*]

She’s quite a person. She was just 80 this last year, I think, and you wouldn’t think she was much over 50 the way she...the way she handles things. She’s quite a person—a delightful person. She did a lot of very valuable work, I think. I don’t know how...whether it’s been followed up or not.
DS: Do you think birth control was a pretty acceptable idea out here?

BW: No. No, I think it was supposed to be very indecent to mention out loud. As a matter of fact, I think it tells in this book that she was going to organize Montana for birth control, and that Wellington, who was the most fastidious gentleman I have ever known, said it was indecent to talk about such things, and if she was determined to go on in that kind of a profession that she should leave the state, and she did.

DS: So they were not exactly close friends at that point?

It’s interesting that with a lot of the women we’ve talked to who are over 80, that most of the women who were homesteaders out here said that they didn’t want that many children and most of them did practice...They hadn’t heard of Margaret Sanger, but most of them practiced some form of birth control. That they didn’t want a lot of children, and they tried not to have that many.

BW: Yes, I think so. But an awful lot of people, especially the church people...well, certain churches, were forbidden to use birth control. Then awful lot of people just, apparently, didn’t know what to do. I think she really did a lot of good, especially in these African and Asiatic countries. She did most of her work overseas.

DS: So few people talked about birth control before they got married. Is that what your experience was here? Before you got married, did people talk about birth control or how many children they wanted before they got married?

BW: Well, I never heard of them doing it, but most of the people I knew had only two or three children. We were quite aghast at people who had five children or more—

DS: How did they do it?

BW: —just as a matter of being able to bring them up and feed them. Apparently, all of the big families got along very well. It’s an interesting thing that in Edna Rankin’s family, she was one of seven children.

DS: What did you or your friends use for birth control? If they only had two or three children, they must have been doing something.

BW: There were lots of ways of doing these things, but there was no instruction, except from our parents. I think mothers told their children—their daughters—the night before the wedding what controls were possible to use. I don’t think they knew very much about it. I think the kind of mothers that we knew must all have told their children what they felt was possible, and they were always told that it wasn’t 1,000 percent...not accurate, but 1,000, what they called, safe but it was a good thing to do.
DS: Were they practicing rhythm, or were they using some device?

BW: I think they used devices. I imagine, devices. I think some people probably, probably it was a rhythm thing, but I don’t think they thought of it as rhythm. I mean, they didn’t have technical words for it.

DS: It was called consideration.

BW: That’s right, that’s right.

DS: Some of the women we’ve talked to talked about...they didn’t call them diaphragms, but they had early diaphragms (unintelligible) and made-up medicines and used those.

BW: Yes.

DS: Have you heard about those?

BW: Oh, yes, and there were...douches made of...I can’t think of the names of these things, but there were two or three well-known chemicals that were supposed to be useful.

DS: And if you douched that was supposed to work as birth control.

BW: Yes, yes. There were chemicals in it that would apparently sterilize the sperms. But an awful lot of people, I guess, just didn’t use them, I think. But I think in the main, there was a lot of use. Now, Edna Rankin, of course, had her own special uses that she had been trained to talk about.

DS: The diaphragm particularly.

BW: No, I think it was, what they called, a coil.

DS: The coil, yes, later on, yes. Into the IUDs.

BW: Yes, yes.

DS: But the thing that Margaret Sanger was put in jail for in this country was for the diaphragm.

BW: Yes, yes. I think the coil was something much later, yes. My, Margaret Sanger was a courageous person. What she—

[End of Interview]