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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

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Kathy White: I am interviewing Mrs. Charles [Winifred] Tisdale at her home in Livingston, Montana, April 1977.

Mrs. Tisdale, you've been associated with the Yellowstone Club here in Livingston for quite some time. Can you tell me what the Yellowstone Club is?

Winifred Tisdale: The Yellowstone is an entirely a study club with some interest, of course, in the community through the library especially. It was organized as a study club and continues as such.

KW: Is it for women or men or what?

WT: The membership is entirely women. When it was first organized we were amused to note in our minutes that the membership was limited to married women. Later they became more lenient, and single women were also eligible.

KW: Why do you suppose it was married women? Did they give an explanation?

WT: No, not in the minutes.

KW: Do you have a guess?

WT: No, I think it was simply a matter of being by married women and possibly married women felt a little more responsibility and little more sure of themselves as citizens then they thought single women might.

KW: That's interesting. How long have you been associated with the Yellowstone Club?

WT: I have been a member of the Yellowstone Club since 1940.

KW: Was that when you first came to Livingston?

WT: Within a year or so, yes.

KW: What has been your role over the years in that club?

WT: The Yellowstone Club requires of its members that each year each member must give the program, as assigned by the program committee, then in due time I have served in the offices, of course, of the Yellowstone Club.

KW: So you have been all of the officers up to president?

WT: The officers are only three in number—president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer—and of course, I have held those offices more than once in the course of the years.

KW: What are the various committees within the club?

WT: Primarily the program committee.

KW: And how many people are on the program committee?

WT: Four.

KW: What kind of things does the club focus in its programming areas?

WT: The programs are surprisingly varied, and each year is different from the previous year. In the current year, which is from September through May of the following year, we have had two, I believe, biographies. We've had a program on Italy, as given by a member who had traveled there; a program on home decorating; one on our Park County Museum; another book review; a play; and "Memory Leaves From My Father's Scrapbook." The father of that member...for that member was Superintendent of Schools here in Livingston. But as I say, each year the programs vary in subject and scope.

KW: Do you know how the Yellowstone Club happened to become organized? Who were the instigators and why they got together?

WT: According to the minutes, the organizational meeting was held on March 21, 1892 at the home of Mrs. E.A. Talcott, whose grandson still lives here, for the purpose of mutual benefit through the study of literature and art. It was to be, and still is, a literary club. At that time it met every Monday evening. Now we meet on the first and third Mondays.

KW: And it met in the home of a member?

WT: Yes.

KW: I understand that the Yellowstone Club has been instrumental in getting the Park County library started and in funding that library and keeping it going.

WT: Yes, and the library here does include in its name the term “County;” it is the Livingston Public Library. County people, of course, are welcome, but it is basically a city library.

KW: And how has that library been funded over the years?

WT: The library, I think, is allowed a small tax levy, but I’ll be happy to tell you how the Yellowstone Club and library became involved with each other.

KW: I’d like to know that, yes. Now, you were telling me about how they got involved with each other the library and the Yellowstone Club.

WT: In late 1900 the Club was asked to assume the responsibility of establishing a public library.

KW: By whom? Do you know?

WT: The Club was asked to assume the responsibility.

KW: By whom? How asked them to do this do you think?

WT: By the city council.

KW: The city council?

WT: Yes. That comes later.

KW: Oh.

WT: The president appointed a committee to interview the city council to see if a suitable room would be furnished. Are we on?

KW: Yes.

WT: Then the next month, early in 1901, the question of a public library was again brought up at a club meeting, and the members pledged themselves to do all in their power to furnish the library should we be so fortunate as to gain the assistance of the council. The council seemed to view the matter favorably of making a room available for a public library. Then the room having been provided in prospect by the council—the city council—the Yellowstone Club realized it would have to do something to obtain the necessary means. Volunteers were received who would solicit...that is who would solicit both for money and books to equip the library and help fund it.

The campaign was carried on through 1901 getting fund...a modest fund of money available, and a good many books were donated. Then there was the question in 1901 of a public opening

of the library—whether that opening should be just for the club members or for the public at large. Naturally, it was decided to open the library to the public, and that opening was to be an affair on a Saturday afternoon and evening. The library room was to be made attractive with plants, and the guests were to be served frappe.

KW: How nice.

WT: On June 17, 1901 the public library was opened, and the members were assigned their duties as librarians.

KW: Oh, so the members volunteered.

WT: The members volunteered—

KW: To be librarians.

WT: —to be librarians, as well as to help raise necessary funds and to collect books for the library.

KW: How long did that go on do you know?

WT: I'm not sure of the length of time that was necessary, but it was evidently quite successful in that a purchase was made of something known as the Warner Library of 46 volumes during that same year. The library, incidentally, at that time was open on Tuesday and Saturday evenings. Early in 1902 the first business taken up by the Yellowstone Club was the proposal to get the city to vote a tax for the free library. But in order to do that, there had to be a signed petition with 100 signatures presented to the city council for action. And the women, realizing it was long before the days of ERA, decided those 100 signatures should be of men only.

KW: They felt that not much attention would be paid to the petition if...Also, it maybe it might have had to be a legal petition since it was for a tax levy and it could only be registered votes.

WT: And it was before women's suffrage by a good many years.

KW: Right. It was long before women's suffrage. That's interesting. It's sort of sad when you think about that—that they were the ones who did the work and then couldn't petition for their own library.

WT: You're so right, so they had to have men's signatures to petition for the tax.

KW: But they got the tax then?

WT: I'm not sure of the amount. It, naturally, was a very small amount.

KW: Did that include hiring a permanent librarian?

WT: Eventually, but I don't know how many years later.

KW: They probably kept up that volunteer business for sometime then.

WT: As long as necessary. Now there's this to be said, though, for the early years of the library and the volunteer situation...That must have been changed to a certain extent when Carnegie Library funds were available and 10,000 dollars, I believe, was provided by the Carnegie Fund to construct the present library in 1903.

KW: Did the city have to write a grant or the Women's Library Committee or whatever had to write a grant proposal for the Carnegie Funds? Do you know how they were obtained?

WT: No, I don't.

KW: You don't.

WT: I don't know.

KW: I don't either. I'll have to some looking up.

WT: Then I might add this—In recognition of the Yellowstone Club's leadership in establishing a library, the Yellowstone Club was allowed to meet in the current library until within the last year when it became crowded, to fill with stacks and books for a meeting to be held there with satisfaction.

KW: Well that's sort of nice to know that the reason they had to leave was they were crowded out by books.

WT: I think they held their meetings for about 70 years in the library. At first, you see, they had met in homes.

KW: The role that the library has played in the community I'm fantasizing or imagining that since the library was open on Tuesday and Saturday evenings that it became sort of a social institution. Do you know anything about whether or not that happened, if people visited and used the library?

WT: Not particularly. But, you see, the functioning was on a volunteer basis anyway, and Yellowstone Club members would agree in advance who would be at the library on Tuesday evening and who would be Saturday evening, that sort of thing. And keep in mind that the

population of Livingston must have been much smaller than it is now. So that was evidently sufficient.

KW: What role does the Yellowstone Club play in the library now? Do they help support and keep making the library?

WT: The Yellowstone Club has made a contribution to the present expansion fund of the library.

KW: And they contribute funds then regularly?

WT: And they have made a good financial contribution to the expansion fund of the present library. Each year the Yellowstone Club...Let's see. Each year on the first day of Library Week the Yellowstone Club is responsible for the silver tea at the library.

KW: The Yellowstone Club was a literary and art association. I assume it still is a literary and art association.

WT: We call it a study club.

KW: A study club.

WT: Which is a misnomer to a certain extent because we don't, as members, have to sit home and study before we go.

KW: Only those giving the program have to sit down and study.

WT: Absolutely.

KW: Yes.

WT: Last year, my program was a book review, and I reviewed a *My Life*. Believe me, I worked on that because those were facts and events and people.

KW: Did the Yellowstone Club participate in the museum in Livingston? I know that you have a nice museum here in town, the Art Museum.

WT: The Yellowstone Club is very much interested in the local museum, which has just recently moved into new quarters—the former North Side School—and many of the members of Yellowstone Club are also involved with the museum.

KW: But it isn't a formal function of the Club to—

WT: Not actually. Through memberships, but not on a club basis.

KW: The Yellowstone Club is a member of the Montana Federation of Women's Clubs?

WT: Right, and of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

KW: And there are also other chapters of the Women's Club.

WT: We call them members, and there are two other clubs in Livingston who are also federated with the Montana Federation and General Federation.

KW: Which came first?

WT: Yellowstone Club.

KW: It's the oldest.

WT: Eighteen ninety-two. Women's Club 1914, I think. Junior Women's club, 1940.

KW: I believe that is just about the route I wanted to cover.

WT: Well good.

KW: Mostly was interested in the role that Yellowstone Club played in the library here in town. Thank you very much Mrs. Tisdale.

WT: You're very welcome indeed. It's been my pleasure.