Community Builders: Women of a Small College Town

Eastern Washington University. Women's Program.
COMMUNITY BUILDERS

WOMEN

OF A SMALL COLLEGE TOWN

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Community Builders: WOMEN of a small college town

Quotations from women interviewed in the Cheney Women's Oral History Project

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To the Reader

During the centennial year of Eastern Washington University, money was made available to develop and sponsor centennial projects. A committee from Women's Programs was formed which developed and submitted a proposal to do a women's oral history project in the city of Cheney. This project was to be funded in part by the EWU Centennial Committee. After further work and discussion, the committee applied for a grant from the Washington Commission for the Humanities. The grant was funded in the spring of 1982, and we began work.

It has been the purpose of this project to record and document through a series of oral interviews the types of activities in which women have been engaged and the contributions that they have made to the community of Cheney and Eastern Washington University. Although women historically have been involved in community building, their participation has frequently gone unrecognized and unrecorded. In this booklet you will find quotations from women which are illustrative reminders of the many ways that Cheney women have been involved in the process of building their community.

We have attempted to interview a broad variety of women of different ages, ethnic and economic backgrounds, and areas of involvement. We realize that there are many women who should have been interviewed but were not. In fact, we would like to have interviewed all the women of Cheney for each one has been important in her own way to our community. However, time and resources did not permit us to do so.

The project materials and cassette tapes collected during the project will be kept in the archives at the EWU Kennedy Library and are open to public use. We hope the project will continue to grow as interested persons complete more oral interviews to add to the collection.

We would especially like to thank those women who were willing to be interviewed and all the others who worked so diligently to make this project a success.

[Signatures]

Project Directors
Community Builders . . . through volunteering

Most of the volunteers are women. Women are more willing to commit their spare time. We all had small children, but we sort of tucked them under our arms and went on about what we were doing. As the economy changed, many went to work, but there is still a built-in do-your-volunteer-thing-for-the-community in the women. The long haul—management, planning, and meetings—has been women.

Tilicum was started by women who were interested in doing something with their minds—getting together, discussing a book, discussing current events, discussing what they could do about changing a particular situation in the town. Women realized many, many years ago that they had a bit more to offer than scrubbing floors, pots and pans, and changing diapers. They had that feeling, and some of them did something about it.

I feel that we've all been given talents to share with people. I started when I was about ten years old as a volunteer rolling bandages for the hospital. It was something that needed to be done and I could do it. Gradually I became involved in fund raising and political activities. It was not a planned thing. It just evolved.

The Woman's Relief Corps has patriotically helped out wherever it could with veterans’ families. We go to the Care Center. We write letters and read to them and visit with them. We have members who work at the Veterans Hospital in Spokane and put thousands of hours in there. We give scholarships to students at the high school. Right now in the old park, the first park, there is a monument there that was placed there and paid for by the Woman's Relief Corps.

I think I would say that volunteerism is down because so many times you find yourself doing the work that somebody else is being paid for.

In the Cheney Track Club, I've been secretary-treasurer forever—since the beginning. I have been assistant coach for a long time. During the spring several mothers and I hold after-school practices. I have gone through a few workshops, so I have a little more knowledge than I used to. I also am record keeper for the club. I am the buyer for the concession stand which is our main source of income. I time and officiate at the local junior high, high school, some college track meets, and cross-country events.

Women have done their share the same as men have. Without one or the other, I don’t believe this would have been Cheney.

I became very active in Campfire Girls in 1932. They needed leaders, and they also needed someone to lead the leaders. I managed the Campfire Girls organization until we had six groups in Cheney. I had time to do it and was able to get other mothers to help as leaders. We began to acquire some fame in the nation and had many of the national executives come and visit us in Cheney. I stayed at that until 1947.

I started in Campfire the way a lot of women do. My little girl wanted to be in Campfire, and I went to a mother’s meeting. I came home a leader.
I first became involved when my daughter joined Bluebirds and I became a group leader. Then I was asked by the Inland Empire Council if I would be on a committee to increase membership here in Cheney. Then I was elected to sit on the Inland Empire Council and served for six years. Then I was elected to the National Council, and we met biannually, making decisions that would affect Campfire Girls all over the United States. It took a lot of time and traveling, and you had to be knowledgeable about many things.

**Community Builders . . . with a library and a museum**

When I came here, the first place I looked for was the Post Office and the store, and then I started looking for the library and I was very much surprised to find there wasn't any. There was a college library, but of course a college library could never meet the needs of a general public, at least it really shouldn't try to. There was a number of people interested in getting a public library. I looked up the library law, and I found that if you had a certain number of property owners sign a petition, the city would have to put it on the ballot. We easily got the signatures, and it went on the ballot of fall of 1966.

After the bond issue passed, we had to persuade the City Council to contract with the library district to get the service they provided. At first, we had bookmobile service; then in January 1968, we opened the branch library.

A good many of us got together—mostly women—and we would go to the City Council meetings. The Council seemed to be getting irritated at me showing up over the months and years listening to what they were saying and asking for a library. Finally, a Councilman said to me, "What would you rather have—sewers or a library?"

The building still had to be furnished. We formed a Friends of the Cheney Library Association. People donated money and we raised over $600. We were able to get some stacks and desks from the old Hargreaves Library, and volunteers painted and built things. Woody Johnson and I went into Spokane and bought some new furniture.

I started the story hour on my own one morning, and I had probably about eight or nine children at the time. I continued it for seven years until I retired. We would have Halloween parties and Easter egg hunts. They were really fun.
Sometime in the 1920's, Tilicum Club started entertaining pioneers (with teas) at a yearly function at which they exhibited their historical items. In 1935, one of the ladies asked Tilicum Club to keep the articles that she had brought. A committee was formed by Mrs. James S. Lane. This was the start of the Cheney Historical Museum.

In 1906, the Tilicum Club got information that a block of land between 4th and 5th and D and C Streets owned by the county could be used for a city park. Three very timid club women appeared before the Mayor and City Council with a petition that the Tilicum Club might be responsible in interesting the cooperation of the community in a city park. The task looked hopeless, but public interest was aroused. Generous citizens donated money and labor. The park dream was finally a reality.

Later a bandstand was erected for concerts, and picnic tables were placed in the city park. The club maintained the park until 1937 when the city took over the task.

I was appointed to the Spokane County Park and Recreation Board. We were trying to get properties-parks for the City of Spokane. I thought we might as well do the same thing in Cheney. So, I would vote for theirs, if they would vote for mine. That is how the Park and Recreation Department got started in Cheney.

Camilla Surbeck
At that time, we all had small children and were hoping to have a place for them to play. As a group, we did the promoting. If we could demonstrate a neighborhood voice for the park, the Park Board would listen to us (we were told). We had meetings, petitioned the Park Board, took surveys, organized the neighborhood, rang doorbells, got signatures, and presented them to the Council. Since then, the funds have dried up.

Sutton Park was a fire hazard. The pine needles were never raked up, and there were a lot of weeds and so forth every summer. We started talking to the City Council about it. We decided the only thing to do was every time we saw a member of the Council, we were going to say, "When are you going to fix up Sutton Park?" They got tired of it. One day a council member said, "I finally decided that you ladies were so determined that maybe we better do something about it." M. Paulsen + DeDe Gamon

The picnic shelter was built through the efforts of Tilicum. They furnished the materials. The Lions Club did the construction.

Tilicum has furnished small grills in (Sutton) park. Tree planting was done in Moos Field.

I worked with the PTO at Betz. We built playground equipment with money from magazine sales—that jungle gym kind of thing. Shirley Pope was really the one who was pushing to get it going. So we cut soup labels and sold T-shirts and everything and got enough money for the materials. A class at the high school designed the thing. We worked all summer. Volunteers came two or three weekends. It took us an entire summer, including having the Cub Scouts come the week before school who started to throw on the cedar shavings.  Karen Neubauer

The Community Service Council was for emergencies—food, clothes, and fuel—and to provide Christmas for those that needed it. Most often, it would be someone that lived in our community, was unemployed, the kids were going to school and hungry. I went to see almost all the people during the years I was doing it. Usually I just took the stuff and took it all over the Cheney School District. Sometimes when the roads were bad, I would get someone to drive me around the country so I wouldn't get stuck.

DeDe Gamon

I think (the Community Service Council) started with DeDe Gamon. She had students that she took into her home who seemed to have no place to go. About that time, Ginny White moved up to 6th Street, and she was helping DeDe, and so they set up a food bank operating out of Ginny's garage. Then we set the food bank up at the fire station.  Ella Frost
The big thing we got started was the food bank. That started first in my basement, then my garage, right during the same time food stamps started. There was a need for some sort of emergency food help before food stamps and a welfare agency could take over. Then we became more of an advocacy board in that we would see that people got to the proper agency.

One of the purposes of the Women's Relief Society is to further women's education. Each week we have a prepared lesson which is given by one of the members of the society. We study theology, literature, different countries and cultures, social relations, world events, parenting techniques and philosophy, and creating a good home environment. We try to cultivate and learn about the traditions that have been a part of our culture since the church was organized. Perhaps one of the biggest objectives of the Women's Relief Society is to cultivate a feeling of sisterhood among the women.

Beta (Sigma Phi) did a lot of things for a lot of people. We gave baskets of food to people who needed them for the holidays. We bought gifts for children who didn't have anything at Christmas. We bought clothes for children who were cold that we found out about through the teachers. We were involved with the March of Dimes for a long time—probably since the beginning of Beta. Then we became involved with Muscular Dystrophy. One of our members had a son who had Muscular Dystrophy. We probably raised 14 to 15 thousand dollars over the years for Muscular Dystrophy.

We (Beta) started doing style shows in an effort to raise even more money for Muscular Dystrophy. The year I was chairman, we changed the beneficiary to Multiple Sclerosis. That was because we had a member in our chapter who had MS.

The (church) women's group used to sponsor youth organizations like Campfire and Boy Scouts. We visited the nursing home sometimes every other week. I had a lot of good religious records. We would sing along. And our women's fellowship collected clothing, sheets, towels, and layettes, and had money sent to a (mission) hospital.

When (the nutrition program for senior citizens) first started, it was through the interest of the senior citizen groups. Grace Kurtz was the first president. They couldn't feed people in City Hall. In a room in the Wren Pierson building, the nutrition program was started in June, 1980. I take care of the technical details of the senior citizen program. The very first time we had 40 to 60 people.

I love working at the care center. I help with crafts and birthdays. I'm the receptionist on weekends sometimes. Every month I fold and address over 200 newsletters. Most of the volunteer work done at the care center is women.

Children under school age were examined at the child health conference held at the Laboratory School under the auspices of the local T ilicum Club in 1937. The health clinics ceased during the war.

You volunteer (at the well-baby clinic) wherever the nurses need you, but essentially assist parents in filling out health cards with health information. And when mothers come in with a lot of children, you would entertain and amuse the children as she took them one at a time into the room where the nurse was doing the immunizations.

I've spent a lot of time helping juvenile delinquents—just kids that I knew, and I would go to court with them and things like that. Sometimes, if it was a kid I knew and liked, I'd just go and say, "What do you think you're doing?" One of them came and lived here for four years. He said, "No one ever bawled me out the way you did. No one else ever cared, and so I want to live here."

(To Virginia White) has become a more local community type effort, and the money has stayed in Cheney ever since. We have donated all the proceeds to Cheney Care Center, the day care center, Salnave School playground fund, Campfire Girls, Community Service Council, the Antonian School, and to children of Beta members who have needed medical assistance. The style shows have traditionally raised around a thousand dollars—sometimes more, sometimes less.

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Community Builders . . . through city government

I think I had served about five years on the Community Service Council at the time they asked me to be on the City Council. The council member who brought up my name said, "We though you needed a new job for all the work you've done." - Virginia White

(On the City Council) I generally spoke out on issues that affected public service, social service issues, elderly, children, health and welfare kinds of things, and they knew I knew more about that than they did. - Virginia White

The first night I was (on the City Council), they were negotiating a contract with Bonneville Power to build a nuclear power plant. But the contract didn't say how much it was going to cost. It just said sign on the dotted line. I said to the city attorney, "What will happen if we don't sign?" After we'd passed the measure that night, I got the city administrator to poll the Council by telephone to see if they would be willing to reconsider their vote if we could get Bonneville Power there. When Bonneville came, we packed the courtroom. They couldn't answer our questions. The Council then voted down entering into the contract for WPSS 4 and 5, and we were the only municipality in the state that did so, except for Seattle. - Virginia White

Women on the police force are an asset to the force and the community. Their presence often negates possible violent actions in potentially dangerous situations. Women are better at reading people's body language. - Virginia White

When I was in the League of Women Voters (Cheney), we set up the first candidates meeting in Cheney (around 1970). Has been carried on since, but not by the League. - Betty Schragg

While I was chairman of the Cheney Planning Commission, we started and completed rewriting of the zoning ordinances, which was a fascinating experience. - Shirley Billings

I was a member of the City Board of Adjustment for eight years. We listened to applications from various people for variances. We would study these and approve or disapprove them. It was a fairly powerful group because we had the power to make decisions without consulting the City Council or the Mayor. There were always women on the board. - Shirley Billings
Community Builders . . .
for a better environment

In May of 1977, the group opened a full scale recycling program on a once a month basis. On the third Saturday of each month, you could (bring recyclables) to the college parking lot. It swallowed everything else up. The recycling project—once it got going—was fairly successful, and a large and complex operation.

In the beginning, (the Environment Action Group) was extremely loose. We'd meet periodically and talk about possible ideas and stick somebody with doing them. We had a committee that handled the recycling end. We had a committee that handled the column. We did research on almost anything. We really weren't daunted very easily.

Bicycles were seen on all the streets in Cheney, and we thought it would be a good idea to have a system of bike lanes in town which would join all the places that children went—to connect the schools, the park, the swimming pool, and the college. We presented it to the City Council in 1972, followed later by a recommendation to the Planning Commission. It was implemented first on the crosstown arterial. Some years later, other women came to the fore when the new junior high school was built, and, eventually, we got a bike lane that was eight feet wide out to the new junior high school.

The city built a new junior high (at the end of) a long stretch of road which had been a raceway. I called the school superintendent and the School Board and was appointed to a committee. I had quite a time convincing the county engineers to slow the traffic and the police to check it. There is now an eight or ten foot wide sidewalk (for walking and biking) separated from traffic by a small ridge of blacktop.

Community Builders . . .
through the schools

The only way I could get enough public support together to convince the Board that we were serious about a new school was to get a committee going. So I made a list of people I thought were influential in the community and I went to talk to all the members of the Board. I asked why the Lab School had limited the enrollment, why they had put the kids down (in the basement of the old junior high school), and why the community didn't know about it. I asked what plans they had to house them in a regular school.

Being a small school in a small community, we could not afford a paid hot lunch chairman. We had to get someone to do this free of charge. I did it. I took charge of the hot lunch. I would get any school commodities that the state was giving out. I took count of the children and meals, and I made out the bills each month, collected the money, and banked it. I did that for about 15 years.

In 1954 the first Beta scholarship for $100 was given to student at Eastern in home economics. It was called the Louise Anderson Scholarship. I has now increased to $400 and goes to a Cheney High School senior—either boy or girl.
The president of the Chamber of Commerce asked me if I would come and talk. So I decided to tell them about the school budget. The budget of the Cheney schools was $22,000 and we had 15 teachers. I don't think there was a man sitting around the room that worked for less than that himself, and they just couldn't believe it. And I think that was the turning point in public support for the schools.

(One reason we began the Antonian School was because) many children had been expelled from other programs or had failed even in special education programs. Their behavior may have been so overt they weren't able to be maintained—multiple handicapping conditions. We found there were many of these boys and girls who had no place to go. Originally, most were from the area. We saw a great need for a home with its own school.

One of the children (at the Antonian School), about nine years old, said, "I've come to help you—to straighten your desk." It was true, it was cluttered. So I let him go ahead, and he neatly stacked things in two spots. I said, "Mike, you've done a super job." "Gee, Sister, you like it?" he said, "I never thought I could do something good in my life." One of the greatest goods that we can do is to help others to reveal their own goodness to themselves.

When we came to Cheney in 1959, both of my children were pre-school. At that time, there were few facilities for children to get into a classroom situation or child care center. There was definitely something needed. Being a musician and not wanting to go outside the home, I developed a musical kindergarten.

In the 70's, I think we were realizing that some of the things we did in haste in the 50's and 60's weren't working. And we're finally realizing that we have daughters and young women that want to participate and do things. At first, it was terribly hard, especially on the men coaches, to think that they had to share the gyms.

My son, a seventh grader, was going to sign up for shop. Girls could take shop if they wanted to, but they had to ask for it specifically. Boys could take home economics, but they called it "Bachelor Living", which assumes the only time a boy needs to know how to cook is when he is a bachelor; once he gets married, somebody else is going to do it for him. I called the superintendent and he asked me to head a committee. Not too much later, things began to change.

Along with many people in the community, teachers, and students, I did help organize and implement the K through 12 gifted program. I assist administratively the teacher of the pullout program in the elementary school and the librarian at the high school who coordinates the mentor program. At the junior high, I am my own boss.

The program (Helping One Student To Succeed) is manned by a volunteer force assisting the teachers. Many hours, days, and weeks were needed to set up the program initially. The first year saw many HOST volunteers. The next year, some didn't return as they found they could leave home, so chose to go to work instead of volunteer. Some people were released from work to work in the HOST program.
Community Builders . . .

at the university

Tawankas were organized in 1926. They were the hostesses of the campus, the welcoming committee, the backbone of all the cheering sections. It was a regular service club.

(I was on the Board of Trustees) following World War II. We had some very acute problems that we had to meet. There was a very drastic shortage of strategic materials. And we also were faced with a filling-up of college enrollment. So we had to use our wits in getting whatever we could.

At one time, there was a danger that foreign languages would be dropped entirely from the curriculum--the administration was not in favor of it. Of course, all of us couldn't imagine a university without foreign languages. Some of us taught overtime—took up several classes—nobody asked us to. We got them to put them in the catalog.

Roberta McNeal

Ruth Cheney Streeter was the granddaughter of Benjamin P. Cheney for whom the town was named. She was a Commander in the Woman's Marine Corps and a friend of President Franklin Roosevelt. She was very interested in our college and especially the scholarships for education for young married women. She established two scholarships of $1,000 each—one for women and one for men.

Louise Anderson was a home economics teacher at Eastern—one of the Chandler girls and a very dynamic and vigorous person. She had a good deal to do with the build-up of the home economics department and the college.

Cecil Dryden was a historian at Eastern. She wrote several books for young people and a history of the college called Light For An Empire.

There were very few women in school (Eastern) teaching in 1943. There were women in the lab school and education department, but there were no women in science and math.

The 60's were a turbulent time. But that was after I was Dean of Women. It was "Camelot time" when I was there.

Thekla Rowles

Marian Lewis

It wasn't until the Isles came that Ruth Ann Isle proposed the idea of having a Faculty Wives' organization. I was enthusiastic about it, so I was elected first president.

Faculty Wives made us one big happy family. We felt like we all belonged and were part of it. We tried to work together as a whole unit instead of separate.

Carol Kabat

Marguerite Barber
In 1970, we called together a group of community women and students and other faculty women. There must have been 30 people at the first meeting, and several of the community women were adamant that we should have a Women's Center. The Center is now a source of information; we have a scholarship file, a library, and a place to socialize. We have programs twice a week of interest to men as well as women.

We were the first university east of the mountains to have a Women's Studies minor. And now the big push is to get (university) introductory courses to incorporate material on women.

During orientation week for freshmen, we had a special meeting for all the parents. We did what we could to answer any questions parents might have. Faculty members, the president of the senate, the academic dean, the president—all addressed issues that were of interest to parents.

Because of my background in retail, I started the fashion merchandising program here at Eastern in 1968. Half of these classes are now offered with the Business School, and students go to work throughout the United States and Canada.

The major problem for a black faculty member on a white campus is a kind of role conflict. We feel obligated to do something out there in the community, not to take everything from the community and not replace it. The students think of you as a surrogate parent, a role model, an advocate; you have a number of different roles to play for them. Your job is much more extended than it is as a white faculty member.

She (Melanie Bell) actively goes out and becomes involved in our national organization. She was primarily responsible for the near future purchase of a software system. She started the first committees, got people interested, got the information together, contacted friends from around the country who were registrars to get information that we could study.
Community Builders . . .

in the world of work

I started work as a telephone operator in 1926 when I graduated. We were in the basement of the old Masonic building. It was scary. I was down there all by myself from 9:30 at night until 7:30 in the morning. It was straight switchboard work. I was responsible for turning in fire alarms and locating the police. I received 32 cents an hour when I started. I'd work at the Cheney Cafe during the noon and dinner hours. I had a brother in college, and my sister was still home then. My mother was working too, and so I sort of helped fill in. I worked 30 years as an operator.

If I had gotten married, I would not have worked during World War I. I didn't believe in women working after marriage. I never asked for a raise in my life. If they figured that I was deserving of it, I got it. I was grateful. I was just happy to have a job.

C. D. Martin became the owner and manager of the mill. When he became governor, naturally he had to leave the mill in the charge of other people. The head bookkeeper, Betty Corley, became the manager.

The whole family helped in the store. I did the bookkeeping. I had a degree from Northwestern Business College and had been a secretary. My husband died in 1944, and I ran the store on my own until 1969—at least 25 years. (Having the store) was a godsend for me.

After (my husband and I) bought the weekly newspaper, I worked downtown half days, wrote news stories and a column, and did the bookkeeping at home. (When my husband died), I took it over and ran it for two years. My work changed because I was not a printer. We still had cold type that you made up pages with-hand set type. I hated that job getting all full of ink. But I had to do it. It was a nightmare—all of the decisions. I would work six or seven days a week. My (high school aged) son had to help nights. He ran one of the presses. And for a year, most of our dinners were downtown.

Women have all types of advancement opportunities if they are just mobile. But I don't think my husband would appreciate me traipsing off here and there, so I stay here.

I really don't work for the money. I would probably work for nothing if they told me I had to. I like the people, and I like the contacts. I like to meet and talk to new people. I get a lot of satisfaction out of that.

I drove wheat truck and punched header. I worked at the hardware I worked for Mrs. Marion Bair five years at the IGA store. And I worked in Cheney restaurants. I cooked and I waited tables. I worked at Fairchild Air Force Base during the war painting houses. The girls got to paint inside, the men did the outside work. I've painted houses here in town inside and outside. I was maintenance mech-
anic at college for a while. I loved that job. That was cleaning air handlers and oiling motors, and putting filters in. They are big machines that turn on a crank and a roll of the filters was taller than I am. That was quite a job, and I had to do it by myself most of the time. I enjoyed it though. I also worked as a custodian at the college. I was one of the first women to get a man's job like that.

The thing stopping many women from going into business on their own is that they never perceive themselves as business people. It is really much easier than most people think to get started in business. It isn't necessary to know everything yourself. There are many sources of free help and advice.

We hope our business downtown will help draw the campus and Cheney closer together.

My whole idea of this Downtown Retail Trade thing was to get the people who weren't involved in Chamber of Commerce Retail Trades involved. It worked, and they eventually all joined the Chamber of Commerce Retail Trades, which is the way it should be.

I am the first woman to be president of the Chamber, and I foresee a real forward movement as far as women of the community. We have some really strong women in the community. Many are good organizers. I can see that a lot of growth in the Chamber will be due to a lot of women's work.

Community Builders...
on the farm

A farm wife is a jack-of-all-trades, and supposedly a master of none. She is called to be chief cook and bottle washer and errand gal. At any given moment, she is to drop everything and chase cattle, or milk cows, or pigs. She is to gather the eggs, and answer the phone, and be knowledgeable about what the party on the other end is talking about.

We milked cows for 15 years. I had to help milk cause we milked from 15 to 25 and up to 40 by hand. And I could milk my 21 just as fast as he could milk his.
My mother was a midwife. The women who were going to have babies used to come to our house for her to examine them. Lots of the time we would wake up in the morning and she would be gone. Someone would have come for her in the middle of the night. She used to go in a two-wheeled cart. She'd ride 15 to 20 miles. Mother was the doctor for everybody. My oldest brother broke his elbow, and she set it. My sister fell off the house and broke her collarbone, and she set it. I fell off an open stairway and broke my arm, and she set that. She was our doctor.

One woman I knew lived on a farm. She ran the hotel, and she was just a good country neighbor. Well, if there was a baby coming or something, she'd be there.

Before we left down-in-the-trees, we always called it, we built our own telephone from Joe Graham's place to our place which was about two miles. We just strung our wire on the trees and ran it down to our place. That was our first telephone in there. Of course, my husband and I did that work by ourselves. Myrtle McMillan

My husband got hurt in a logging accident, and we had three little children, and I was pregnant with another. I had 18 head of cattle to milk morning and night. It was in the spring, and they just kept coming up with milk, and I never hated a cow so bad in my life. So I said if I'm gonna help make the living, it's not gonna be out here shovelling this stuff. I'm gonna go somewhere else and work.

I kind of accidentally became the livestock leader for the East Cheney 4-H club. So I worked with the Cheney 4-H for about 15 years, and helped with the Spokane Junior Livestock Show and the Spokane Interstate Fair. I took the 4-H team from Spokane County to Portland to the Pacific International Livestock Show, and we won first place in the livestock judging contest. I feel it has been a good program for the children around here and my own children.

The Grange was a fraternal organization that was one of the few at that time that included women. The Grange was instrumental in getting railroad crossing signs, mail delivery in the Amber area, and road improvements.

Back in the early 60's, we had a big fire and two families lost their homes. The Grange sponsored a fund for them. We collected clothing, household items, furniture, curtains, and what-not to furnish a home. I think mostly the women did it. I think women are the backbone of these organizations. I think they still are.

They don't realize up on the hill how much the farmers contribute to the good life of Cheney.

Community Builders... through national movements

I can't remember that we were active in the suffrage movement. I'm sure we were all for it. We never talked about women's suffrage in our family.

I don't remember any big fuss about women getting the right to vote. When the time came, I registered and voted. It wasn't an issue.
At a Tilicum meeting in 1930, Mrs. Wallace read a resolution passed at the Women's Clubs in Spokane asking all members to condemn all transactions with illegal liquor. This was adopted.

At another meeting of the Tilicum Club in 1930, the minutes say: The Tilicum Club of Cheney, Washington, by unanimous vote has expressed its opinion: Be it resolved that we urge the support of the ratification of the World Court Protocols. We as a body are firmly convinced of the necessity of the United States entering the World Court.

At a Tilicum meeting in 1935, a communication was read asking support of the club in passing an amendment on birth control to be introduced in the state legislature. The motion was made and carried.

I do know that during the period of time in which I was really quite actively engaged in human rights issues, the Cheney schools improved greatly, particularly the junior high. Often I would spend a lot of time here at home at this kitchen table with 6 to 8 black students. They were often genuinely amazed to find out that many white people were afraid of them, because they were afraid of white people.

I don't think the civil rights movement or peace movement had a big effect on Cheney. We read about it, but as far as the Cheney area, no.

Elsie Ableman

The first peace march in Spokane was in 1965, maybe 1966. We assembled under the courthouse and the jail was on the top floor. The convicts were screaming obscenities at us, calling us Communists, just having fits. We were exercising our right of protest. After Kent State, there was quite a demonstration. Emerson (Shuck) called me and asked if he could appear at the demonstration or if there would be violence. I said it is all right if you appear, but if you say it was a shocking display of violence on the part of the students, you're in trouble. He spoke a few brief words and the students received it rather well. I was faculty advisor to the student peace group, which meant that I had to stop them from doing some things that would do more damage than good. I negotiated with the administration and helped organize the teach-ins.

Eastern Washington WCTU members, c. 1890.

An advisory council to the Human Rights Commission started. We had plenty of complaints. If it was a relatively minor thing, one or two of us would go and talk to the person involved, and sometimes all you had to do was explain what the law was, and that was all it took. If a black person complained they were discriminated against in housing, we would send a white person to see if there was a vacancy. If there was a vacancy, we could assume that the black person had been discriminated against.
In 1930 the Great Depression came along and all married teachers were weeded out of school. It was a matter of survival and we didn't question it. So from then on I raised my family and substituted.

The state didn't have any money, so they had to pay people in warrants, and we bought a warrant. That meant you were providing money for a teacher.

It wasn't easy. We lost part of our wages. They were cut down, but I sometimes felt guilty because I didn't lose my job. I got less pay, but the things I bought were a lot cheaper.

Two winters (my husband) was out of work and Marion Bair carried us through groceries for the winter. This year and age you can't find any grocery store that will give you credit through the winter to get by when you are out of work. Thank goodness to Marion Bair, we made it through these two winters.

Thank goodness to Marion Bair, she helped many Cheney families live through hard times by extending credit for goods in her IGA grocery store. She has been "just like a little grandmother" in her generosity and kindnesses to people in the community.

When we got the word that World War I was over, the girls from the bank just walked out and joined in the celebration. I don't know how we got on top of that roof, but we were up there. There must have been a stairway. I think we rang the bell and whooped and hollered a little.

I used to be able to sit down there (Telephone Company) and read, embroider, crochet, stuff like that. It was fairly quiet. But that last year on the board, it was so busy (the soldiers coming through town). It was all I could do to take care of it.

A friend and I would go up and gather information for the weather bureau. They had a station up at the college. We would go up and read these little signals and somebody from the Spokane office would call us and ask us for the reading.

During World War II, the women would do anything--like rolling bandages, tearing up their sheets, and all meet together at the church, or the school, or someplace and roll bandages and make slings and this kind of thing to send wherever--gloves and socks and scarves and a lot of things--to send overseas.
Women did many things that weren't the traditional roles for the war effort. They took over men's jobs because the men were away at war. (They worked as) painters, carpenters, and truck drivers.

I worked at the Shell Service Station during the war. I did everything from pumping gas to changing tires. Honestly, it was not difficult for a woman to find a job because there were just not that many males around at that particular time. - Pat Conns

Because I sort of like to write, and they were needing some reporters during World War II when all the men were gone, I began acting as social reporter, taking any kind of news that came my way. - Lula Cutting

During World War II there was a great need for canning because of the rationing and the difficulty of getting many things, so everyone grew as much garden produce as possible. The U.S. Department of Agriculture encouraged every community to establish a safe canning center. I was paid to do this. We acquired a steam boiler, two large steam pressure cookers, racks, a can sealer, and various other necessary items. We installed these in the old high school bus barns. People brought in their produce ready to put in the cans, and we processed it. Sometimes in the heavy loads I wouldn't get through until about two o'clock in the morning. It had to be done then, or not at all. It was strenuous work.

The college was very eager for students since they were losing so many to the war. They encouraged housewives to take special courses and to go to school. We just had a real ball and a real opportunity which we couldn't pass up. - Lula Cutting

Through Beta, I remember doing ditty bags for the servicemen in Viet Nam. That was done primarily through the Red Cross, but there was a special interest in all of that because some of our Beta members had husbands in Viet Nam. So we sort of felt like we were helping them too, the sisters we had in Beta who were wives of servicemen. - Solly

But it Wasn't Always Easy...

I went down and attended some Council meetings. I didn't go all by myself, but I think I was the only one that talked—about a lot of issues. One was I wanted mail delivered. I wanted the streets paved. Someone came to me and said that you better not go down; the men don't like it. They were talking about me—too bossy or too forthright, and if I stayed home it would be better. - Ruth Williamson

Many people thought there should be a woman on the City Council. I think there is still the feeling that there should be a woman—as opposed to two, or three, or seven.

I think when I took women's lib seriously was when I joined the City Council. I had never had anybody treat me that way before. I always thought I'm as good as anybody else is, and you know I had never had anyone question my opinions or treat me like an idiot before.

When I came to Eastern, I was put on the Legislative Committee. I was delighted to be on it, and we were meeting with the legislators. I felt it an important committee until I discovered that my sole role was to talk to the legislators' wives. I was the only woman on the committee, and I was told they put me on the committee because I was young, I was pretty, and I could talk to the wives. In 1983, you find women on all the important committees.

The boys' sports were always better funded than girls'. They only had one gym in Showalter. It was only for men. The women had to go outside.

I know that what I was fighting for all the time is what has taken women many, many years to achieve—and that is to be recognized as an athlete. I felt I probably could play football and baseball equally as well as the guys, and sports was my whole life. But then...
you didn’t fight for anything. You felt bad you couldn’t compete like the men. But you more or less had to stay in the background.

Practically everyone in school (at Eastern) worked (during the Depression). Most of the girls couldn’t work enough to earn their complete way. The boys could.

I think the women who stand out are the ones who wanted to promote women's equality.

When I went out to teach, it was all women in the elementary schools. Men teaching in secondary schools received more money than did women who were teaching at the elementary level.

The men were, as they are now, always paid more than the women teachers.

Discrimination’s not an issue as far as teachers are concerned as in this district there is a salary schedule adhered to. I was raised on the farm with the idea that if you were strong enough or had the knowledge, you were expected to do the work. There was no discrimination as to sex and I was never felt to be less because I was a girl. Have never felt this in Cheney in my area of teaching. I believe ERA probably opened fields to women that had not been available to them before.

I'm sorry that I couldn't have had the same opportunities that young women of today have as I probably would have pursued some other things.

As far as the woman's world in banking, there was just a certain area you could go and that would be about as far as you could go. You could not hold an administrative manager's or assistant manager's job. I felt that I wanted to go to the top as high as I could go. I wanted to be head teller eventually. But as far as management positions at that time, they were not offered to women.

I just really don't pay too much attention to the ERA. It doesn't involve me.

As far as women's service organizations go there are a lot, but there is nothing as powerful as Kiwanis, Rotary, and Lions. The purpose of those organizations is for professional men to meet other professional men to make bonds for business. That is a very difficult system to break into. You can't as a woman.
## Interviewees

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*Tapes added to the collection courtesy Eastern Washington Historical Society

## Interviewers


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