

ALINE MACNEVEN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

Biography

Aline MacNeven was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, in 1922. She was one of six children and grew up on the family farm, which was located about ten miles outside of East Grand Forks, Minnesota.

In May 1941, Aline relocated to Washington, D.C., where she spent World War II working as a civilian in the War Department. She was a stenographer and helped keep track of transport ships all across the world, including confidential information.

In 1945, Aline returned to Minnesota and completed nursing training, a field she would work in for the next forty years. She married Leonard “Scotty” MacNeven in 1950 and had one child, John. Aline passed away in 2015 in Roseville, Minnesota.

Summary

In this interview, Aline MacNeven discusses her work as a stenographer in the War Department and her experiences handling confidential information. Aline further recounts her experiences living and working in the nation’s capital during World War II.

Keywords

Pearl Harbor, Department of War, stenographer, women, Washington, D.C., rationing, blackouts, USO, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, atomic bombs

INDEX

00:00 – Introduction
00:22 – Basic information and overview
04:11 – Finding work during the war
05:17 – Working for the War Department

06:30 – Hearing about Pearl Harbor
07:10 – Blackouts in Washington, D.C.
07:51 – Rationing
08:19 – Other reactions to Pearl Harbor
08:50 – More on rationing
09:19 – Activities in Washington, D.C.
09:36 – Wartime security in Washington, D.C.
10:07 – Sightseeing over the weekends and day tours
11:29 – Working as a stenographer
12:07 – Clearances to handle confidential information
12:24 – Description of the War Department building
12:53 – Colleagues at the War Department
13:37 – Ice skating in Washington, D.C.
15:13 – The White House being put off limits due to the war
15:52 – USO gatherings
17:57 – Visiting servicemen at the hospital
19:09 – Volunteering for the service
19:51 – Patriotism during the war
20:37 – Church life during the war
23:02 – Seeing people heading off to the war
23:36 – Being single in D.C.
24:41 – Changes after Pearl Harbor
24:49 – “The war to end all wars”
25:14 – Finding housing in D.C.
26:57 – Work culture in the War Department
29:25 – Confidential procedures
30:10 – Changes in the community after the war started
30:56 – Fear of war in D.C.
31:47 – Japanese cherry trees in D.C.
32:59 – Attitude towards the Japanese and Germans
33:31 – Lack of bias against people with German names in the U.S.
33:47 – Rationing
34:52 – Shortages during the war
35:28 – Community bonding

36:01 – Train trips during the war
36:26 – Changes back home as a result of the war
36:54 – Brothers’ draft deferments
38:06 – Living away from family
39:18 – Letter writing and phone calls
39:55 – Financial situation during the war
42:19 – War’s effect on farming
42:47 – Typical day in D.C.
45:19 – Changes in daily life during the war
45:52 – Franklin D. Roosevelt’s death
48:18 – Leaving D.C.
50:05 – Friend meeting her husband
50:37 – Atomic bombs
51:56 – St. Paul after the war
52:30 – V-J Day
53:08 – More thoughts on the end of the war
54:26 – What the war meant
55:19 – Change in feelings towards World War II
56:18 – How the war changed her life; nursing
57:27 – Changing as a person; awareness of friends and neighbors
57:51 – Reconnecting with a wartime friend
1:01:13 – Conclusion

STORY TRANSCRIPTS

Story 1: Finding Work During the War [4:28 – 5:19]

A girlfriend and I, we were looking for work. We were through with high school, and in fact, we’d gone to business college for a year or so. But still there was no work. So, her mother said to us, “Civil service is hiring. Why don’t you two go to Crookston [Minnesota] and take the civil service test?” So, we found out about that, and we did.

My girlfriend got called first, and the job was in Washington, D.C. And I got called about a week or so later. And then she was already there, so I thought, “Well, yeah, I’ll go too.” It was okay because we were friends through high school. So then, I went there. It was May of 1941.

Story 2: Hearing About Pearl Harbor

[6:25 – 7:25]

DB: *Do you remember the date, 7 December '41, then?*

Oh, yes.

DB: *Where were you and what were you doing?*

It was on a Sunday, as I recall. And my girlfriend and I were home and listening to the radio, and we heard that. It's hard to believe, but that's what happened.

DB: *Okay, so you were at your apartment, then, in Washington?*

Yes, uh-huh.

DB: *How did you react right away? Do you remember what you first were thinking?*

I don't really remember, except it was rather scary. You know, here we are, and are we safe here in the nation's capital?

I remember just when they started doing blackouts, we had to keep sheets drawn all the time at nighttime. I remember that.

Story 3: Securing Housing in Washington, D.C.

[25:20 – 26:22]

DB: *Did the War Department help you find that apartment? Or how did you find housing when you went out there?*

That's a good question. You know, when I first went out there, the Walther League sponsored a place, just a room and board. And it seems like I first went there when I first came there. But girlfriend was there already, so then we decided to get an apartment together.

So, I can't think of the name of this place we went. It was sponsored by the church or Walther League for Christian young people. That's where I was until my girlfriend and I decided to get an apartment together.

DB: *So, it was actually a place set up for people coming out there, to help them with transitional living?*

Yes. I don't know if they could live there indefinitely or not, but it was just until we found an apartment.

Story 4: Japanese Cherry Trees

[31:47 – 32:31]

You ever heard of the—I think they used to call them the Japanese cherry trees, around the Tidal Basin there in D.C.? If remember right, I think they took that Japanese name off of it and just called it “the flowering cherry trees.”

I remember that because they were always the “Japanese [trees].” And the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and they thought, “Well, we have to get rid of that name.” So, they cancelled out the “Japanese” off of those cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin.