

Interview with Jimmie Tilden, Feb. 21, 1984.

Annette: Could we start by you telling me your background experience with the Senior Center, or when you first became involved with them, --in what terms would you have been connected with the Senior Center of Ukiah?

Jimmie: Oh, it would go back even before the Senior Center, working in the Health Dept., in the Board and Care homes, and at that time, that's when they initiated a mandatory tuberculosis skin test, not only for the operators but for the patients. So I've been in almost all of the Board and Care homes. They are all very fine as far as the physical care was concerned, but some were much more innovative than others wherein they looked at the individuals as persons and attended to their individual needs. The smaller homes, of course, are 6 people, and the larger ones are up to 12. There were some of the homes that huge rooms, ~~and they~~ ^{they were} had chairs, and people just sat in there.

Annette: What was the basic purpose of the Board and Care homes?

Jimmie: Those people were really unable to care for themselves. This was under, at that time, the Old-Age Assistance programs, through the county. They needed someone to care for them, their needs, and very often families were unable to take them and care for them, so they were placed in the Board and Care homes. Some of them were voluntarily. There was a very fine one up there on Standley. That lady, you would have thought that that was the elite club someplace in Paris or England, this type of individual. I mean the price was high there, they were all individual pay in there.

Annette: They weren't like rest homes, though, huh?

Jimmie: Not rest homes, they're Board and Care. They give no physical, ~~but~~ they must be ambulatory.. Surely, they will take those who have a little bit of mental instability. But nothing major, no. They did no nursing. In fact, according to the regulations they're not supposed to even give the medicine--they could put it ~~out~~ and supervise it, but they are not supposed to give it, that's important. As I say, that's the Board and Care home, and we still have them, and there are many fine ones, then there are others--well, they get their check, and that's it, and they're not really all that good.

Gradually, we'll be able to overcome those. Now like the Senior Center up in Willits with their Adult Day Health Care. They have I think 3 of the Board and Care managers who bring their clients to the Adult Day Health Care, and those people are supervised. And they give them their therapy and this sort of thing. Some of the clients for MSSP and their social Day Care Center come from Board and Care homes.

Annette: Well, now this was in the years prior to the Senior Center?

Jimmie: That's when it started, yeh.

Annette: What years, approximately?

Jimmie: Oh, gad--that would be the early '60's, and around in through there. Then, see, the Older Americans Act came into being--what?--1964, I think--which gave much more impetus, and there were Federal regulations on the moneys coming in. And this is where much more latitude was given. Now here in Ukiah, the Progressive Senior Center was started by a group of seniors, like the Trimbles. And Mrs. Jones, Jim Jones mother...

Annette: Lynetta?

Jimmie: Lynetta, yeh, she was ^{such} just a gun-ho person.

Annette: I have heard this from many people.

Jimmie: Yes, yes, she was really, really a terrific little person; no bigger than a grasshopper, but boy, she was mighty. And Lois Anderson, and many of those--oh, Mr. ~~Be~~ Gunner, the attorney who passed away, and Mr. Hildebrande...

Annette: That ^{was} worked with the PROGRESSives?

Jimmie: Yes, that's where it started. And--what's her name?--Mary Jennings?

Annette: Yes, I've heard her name from a lot of people. ~~Well, how did these early Board and Care homes?--was there a connection between those and the later development of the Senior Citizens Center?~~

^{Progressives}
Jimmie: Well, you see, that was really the only association who recognized the elderly.

Annette: At that time?

Jimmie: Yes. And if you recall, the latter part of the 1960's and the early part of the 1970's was the youth generation--the me, the now generation, you know? You were over the hill at 30 years. So it was quite a struggle. Then Mr. Trimble and Dr. Kroeger and George Bartlett--they started putting together the Senior Center, and with no direct funding.

Annette: Tell me about Dr. Kroeger. I really don't know what his position was, but I've heard his name from time to time.

Jimmie: Well, he was one of the starters. See, he was the first health officer here. He established this whole Health Department for the county of Mendocino.

Annette: And you worked with him?

Jimmie: Yeh. He came in '52, and I came in '55.

Annette: Uhuh.

Jimmie: And all those years. And, of course, he spent 5 years taking care of his wife after he retired. Then she finally passed away. And so then he went back to become extremely active in the Senior Center. And--I mean he was a formidable individual, and he had contacts from the national on down, and was an avid letter writer. If there was a question, he always felt there was an answer to it. That was always helpful. And of course I retired from--or resigned from--the Health Department, and that was in--let's see, '72, '73, somewhere in there. Then I took a year's sabbatical to get my teaching certificate, and also to ride herd on my 15-year-old daughter.

So then I started working with Burr ~~Langford~~ ^{Langford} the Homemaker--it was at that time, Homemaker Chore. We got the contract through the Dept. of Social Services for delivery of Homemaker Chore work, in the homes of the aged. See, prior to that, there was care of sorts, like Lake County still has it. Direct pay to the client of whichever, how many hours that were assigned to them that they needed to care for their home, or to cook a meal, or something like this.

Annette: The people were sent in to do that for them?

Jimmie: No, the people weren't sent in. The person was given this extra money, and they had to get their own. And very often it was--oh, it was horrible when we took it over.

Annette: BUT this organization you mentioned paid for it?

Jimmie: That was state. That was State Welfare Funding. It was direct paid to the clients. So a number of these people would come in--some of them wouldn't even bother to pick up a dust cloth, and swish it around. You know \$50 or whatever it was...

Annette: These were the people they hired to go to work for them?

Jimmie: Yes, the oldster would. They were really, really being--just scammed to pieces. The Dept. of Social Services and, of course, our Board of Supervisors, elected then to go with the State. Then the State fundings would be contracted by this Homemaker Chore program. And so we set that up. And it meant that all of these people, who were under the old pay type, we then had to interview them and work with the social workers and get the hours up to par. Some of the workers--if they wished to come to work for us--were fine. And that's how I got into teaching and through ROC. So I had 3 levels then--the Choreworker, and there were 2 other levels. And I taught them the simple things to watch for, when they're working in a home. Maybe this person is degenerating in some way, maybe you notice a palsy in one arm, or maybe it will appear that they're losing weight or something like that. We caught that. Because I, as a supervisor, could contact a doctor, and have that person brought in. That way it was preventive medicine. So then Medicare became broader in its scope. And under Plan B--there was no deductible for that, if you opted for Plan B. A nurse would go in--this was under a doctor's care--a nurse would go in, and a home health aide, when the person came home from the hospital. I have some documented records of persons who suffered stroke, where the doctors were particularly cooperative and allowed

them to come home instead of shunting them off to a convalescent hospital. We had them up and functioning, maybe not normally but functioning, and some of them today, they function as normally as anyone would because of that incentive.

Annette: That's wonderful. Could we connect this to the Senior Center, if it's possible?

Jimmie: Yes, in a sense, because that would be one of...Going into a home, you'd find someone sitting there lonesome. And you'd say, 'You know, we've got a group of people, about your age, and--wouldn't you like to just talk to somebody once in awhile?' And next thing you'd know, you could arrange for the outreach worker to come and get them, take them down, introduce them. The other thing was the nutritional benefits. 'Cause all those meals are supervised, they're not just thrown together. And some of them allow their nutrition program--and now their nutrition program is exemplary, 'cause a lot of them will take home a little package of it, and that'll be their evening meal too. There's not as much sociability in this Center, as there is in some of the other Centers. But we hope to get around to that.

Annette: Were you involved in some of the initial efforts to get the Senior Center started?

Jimmie: Yes, you see as an outreach worker--you know, not working directly in the Center--I've done blood pressures down there, and I've helped with eye exams, and I've helped with all types of medical. But as an outreach worker, to get the people in.

Annette: Yeh, but that's a very important role.

Jimmie: Yeh, to see the need and point it out and make arrangements for transportation. Course now they have buses, but they also have Dial-a-Ride, too, which we didn't have in those days.

Annette: Do you remember it when it was down on the building on State Street?

Jimmie: Betty Cooper's building down there? Yes. I remember one night I was there for some meeting. I used to, as often as I could, drop by for their meetings, just to keep abreast of what's going on. One night there was a lady had a heart attack. And she'd come over from Lake County. We got her up, though, that's when Hillside--we got her up there to Dr. Wilson. She didn't have a doctor here, but Dr. Wilson was my doctor, so I called him up and got hold of her husband.

Annette: Well, I guess the health aids were primary all the way through. I haven't heard a lot about them, I've heard more about the nutrition program, but the health is such a basic ongoing...

Jimmie: That's right. Well, of course--I like this house. This house is beautiful. But if you didn't have this (pointing to stove)

and your kitchen range--it wouldn't be anything much.

Annette: It'd be cold.

Jimmie: Well. And you wouldn't be able to enjoy it. And you'd probably have sniffles and snuffles? Well, this is the same thing with the body. You see, nutrition is one of the needs, but what you need is ~~supervision and medication~~ supervision and medication.

Annette: So that's largely where you came in?

Jimmie: Well, and referrals to doctors. And answering questions-- I still do this; in fact, I have people who call me.

Annette: To get back to Dr. Kroeger a minute--did you work for him, or with him?

Jimmie: He was the Health Director, I was the Public Health Nurse.

Annette: You mentioned a little earlier that you wanted him to get the credit that he deserved, and I was just wondering what he did that was...

Jimmie: Well, he started the Health Dept. here. And he also started-- cleaned up the whole blasted county from tuberculosis. We had tuberculosis like you wouldn't believe. He was very instrumental in getting health needs for the Indians recognized. He was also extremely effective and one of the planning people for the Community Hospital-- the new Community Hospital. He was extremely effective in correcting some of the mental health problems that arose when Talmage was being phased out. He started the first mental health--consultation clinic, I think you would call it, for the people of the community. He was a true, true health officer.

Annette: He belonged to the Progressives, too--did you say that? That he belonged to the Progressives..or did he just help them get started?

Jimmie: Yeah, he helped them get started.

Annette: Was he ever on the Board?

Jimmie: You mean of the Senior Center Board? No, he placed himself as more of a consultant. He was at every Board meeting, and, not only that. You know we are rural. And there's 14 northern counties that are just as rural, some more rural, than we are. Though there are some, and they call themselves the rebels, that have the same concerns, same needs--in some respects, more--that we have in Mendocino County. So he travelled up there and met--I know many, many of those people up there--and they really were quite influential in getting the State legislature to recognize Senior needs. In fact, the way George Bartlett got to be on the Commission on Aging was, that those people up there-- you know, in their council--and they wrote this very direct letter to the powers that be in Sacramento: the Director of the Welfare Dept., and a copy to the Governor, and a copy to our Senator and our Assemblyman--informing them that: 1) there was no representative on the Commission of Aging north of the Golden Gate, 2) if there was no one

appointed within a certain span of time, that they themselves were going to appoint the commissioner. At the same time, they submitted George Bartlett's name and Archie Kirkpatrick from Butte County and one other. Lo and behold, all 3 got appointed to the Commission.

Annette: Uhuh.

Jimmie: Uhuh. So that's what it takes. So they were kind of a backup, too, for establishing this type of system for their rural colleagues. Just as we're having to fight our way through, now, this Adult Day Care. 'Cause everything's for the urban. Well, George Bartlett used to go with doctor up to--most of their meetings were held in Redding--and George used to go with him. Then, when doctor couldn't drive anymore, I would drive up. And I learned a great deal too, it made a good contact. Because right now I'm Assemblywoman for the Senior legislation, representing Mendocino and Lake counties. I also sit on the HSA Executive Board for Region 1--that's the Health Systems Agency--and I'm a member of the Grey Panthers. I just came from the State Conference a week ago, and it was so interesting. I'm just keeping my fingers crossed I get to go to the National Conference, which is going to be in San Jose, to hear Maggie Kuhn. You know, these people on the National level--it's exciting. When you meet these personalities, then you can correspond with them. They give you hints, and they can do things for you. Well, you can do things here, you're not helpless in a rural county. Just even talking about it..or writing about it.

Annette: What do you think about the statement I've heard from some people I've talked to about the Senior Center, ~~which~~ that started out with the idea of legislative action for Seniors, but now--since they became funded--the legislative action is no longer possible without losing their funding. In other words, some of the reasons it started--as I understand it, the Progressives--they started out to try to effect legislative improvements, for elders. And that, since they're receiving government funding--people tell me--that avenue is cut off, to some extent.

Jimmie: Well, that is a little bit mixed up. Because the Progressives met a social need, yes, and also as a voice. Through them, through the Older American's Act, there were fundings, built into law now. So they were effective that way. Now Triple A, which is the Area Agency on Aging--that was a mandate that came down, I think in 1976 or 77. That embraces the nutrition, the outreach, transportation--the needs of the Seniors. And whoever says that it's no longer effective--the only thing I can see is that they're not really involved.

Annette: Not that it's no longer effective, but that legislative action has been cut off because of the funding.

Jimmie: No, no, no, no. Because on the Federal level we have a Commission on Aging. You've heard of Senator Pepper, and Senator Riebold of California. Pepper's in Florida now, but Riebold's Ryboids still up there. And on the State level there's Senator Mello and Wly Moorhead oh, there's a lot, that's being done politically, in the legislature. I wish that I had brought the bills of our Senior

legislature. We have a very good track record. See, this'll be the 4th one coming up. But the first year, 10 of our priority recommendations were passed. The next year, there was 7...that passed en totale. The last year there was 7--2 were attached, and one was dropped.

Annette: Were you familiar with the early Progressives?

Jimmie: What the Progressives did ~~was~~--they had \$500, I believe, was left over, and they gave that to the Senior Center. So it was amiable.

Annette: So the Senior Center gradually grew, and the Progressives faded out.

Jimmie: And another influence too was that there is a National Association of Retired Persons. Many people are active in that. Though they don't do a heck of a lot--it's mainly social--it fulfills a need for those persons who feel that they don't want to become involved in community needs and projects. It is terrifically time-consuming.

Annette: I wanted to ask you when Dr. Kroeger died.

Jimmie: It'll be 2 years, April 13th.

Annette: Well, then, it hasn't been that long. He was involved for a long time after they moved into the Center on Leslie. He was involved from the time it started until his death--was he?

Jimmie: That's right. So many people say--oh, how I miss doctor, because he kept things pretty well on the straight and narrow. He called a spade and spade, and he did so in such a way that there was no hard feelings. There would be a discussion, yes, but no argument. And he could change your mind. And you could change his mind. He wasn't a close-minded individual.

Annette: But his role with the Senior Center you would see largely as consultant and supportive?

Jimmie: Consultant and supportive, and he gave money and helped raise money. He was sort of a political outreach worker.

Annette: Uhuh. And you would see your role as similar, too, wouldn't you? A political outreach, and also health worker?

Jimmie: Now it's more political, yes. Well, it's still health too. I go to the Board of Supes, and I sit there, and I just eyeball them. They appreciate the interest and we cannot--it's so unfair to expect 5 persons to be all-wise in everything. They expect us to do our homework--get our act together, get our data together, present it to them.

Annette: Is there anything you might like to add, that we've overlooked, that you can think of?

Jimmie: Certainly I want Dr. Kroeger to get in.

Annette: Certainly a mention, anyway, in the history.

Jimmie: Not just a mention! He was one of the backbones of it. Simply because he is dead is no sign he should be forgotten. You know, this is what's so irritating. People have such short, short memories.

Annette: Well, giving credit to people who have been part of it in the past, I would consider an important part of the history.

Jimmie: He started it. Don't those people know they wouldn't have it if he wasn't in there plugging? Plugging up there 14 times a day, plugging in Sacramento, plugging in Washington, D.C. It should be carried on.

Annette: Do you have any ideas about the kind of history you would like to see written? This is a question still in the process of being decided. Long or short? Soft or hard cover? Photos and graphics?

Jimmie: Well, I think a softback with pictures--I'm sure we can stir up enough pictures.

Annette: Getting a feel for the personalities that were gone, see--before my knowing them--like Lynetta and like Dr. Kroeger, people who worked very hard from the beginning, I think that's important. I have to be given that feel from people like you, since I wasn't there and I didn't know them.

Jimmie: Well, this is true and--now I have a few things of his and I thought I'd bring them along, then I thought--'Oh, good gracious, I'd better talk to her first. So as we go along, I hope you'll keep in touch...

Annette: Yes, I will. And when I get down to the writing--at this point it's in the research stage. Where did Dr. Kroeger come from. Something I'm trying to get is personal background of the people involved.

Jimmie: He came from Arizona. And he spoke Spanish fluently. He was of course, German descent on both sides. He ran away from home and went on the ocean. He sailed all over the world, and he had--ooh, I've ridden many thousands of miles with him--you know, in the course of business. And at first I was thinking, 'Oh, well, gee, I guess he reads a lot of Reader's Digests or something. But come to find out they (his stories) were true, because as I got to know him better--there were people who could testify to that. He became ill, he had picked up some tropical disease that infected his jaws, so he lost most of his teeth, and a couple of other physical ailments. He has a sister, 2 years younger than he--Dr. ~~Hilda Kroeger~~ who of course is no longer practicing, but she lives in Pittsburgh. He graduated from the University of Illinois, in medicine. I mean, just really exemplary people. And he has always had sincere regard for Senior Citizens. And with kids, children. Children just seem to take from him. He was a big man--6', 3 or 4", something like that.