

Museum of History and Industry
Historical Society of Seattle and King County

Transcript

Frances Owen - taped interview, January 29, 1985
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This is an interview with Frances Owen, on the 29th of January, 1985. The interviewer is Lorraine McConaghy for the Museum of History and Industry.

Side A

Q. Let me ask you how you heard about the Pearl Harbor attack.

Mrs. Owen I was sitting at my dressing table on Sunday morning, with the radio on - I think we kept the radio on a good deal of the time because we didn't know what was going to happen - when all of a sudden I heard it announced. My husband had gone down to his office that morning, and I remember calling him and he said, "Yes, he had already heard it." That was my introduction to Pearl Harbor.

Q. You said you had been listening to the radio. Were you not shocked then? Had you been expecting something of this kind?

Mrs. Owen Before that time, we weren't officially in the war. But, yes, Pearl Harbor was a terrible shock not only to the Seattle area but up and down the coast. We were the people who were closest to Pearl Harbor in the United States. It was a very severe shock to all of us - not only that it had happened, but the tremendous loss of life and what it had done to our forces. It left a very, very strong impact on everyone.

Q. Would you say there was any impact of panic? Were people very afraid those first days after Pearl Harbor in the coastal cities?

Mrs. Owen I wouldn't say it was panic, but there was definite fear. From really hours after Pearl Harbor, we were all made aware on radio that we must at night let no glimmer of light out of our windows. We put blankets over the windows to keep light out - shades weren't enough because you could see the light behind them. So it was suggested that we put blankets over the window so there would be no light whatsoever to show that there was anyone there. As I remember, we did that for two or three nights - it may have been a longer period than that.

There was a real fear that the Japanese would come right on over from Pearl Harbor and attack the Pacific Coast states. We, and California and Oregon, really had something to worry about.

Q. Do you recall making any family plans to meet in the basement? Did you have a personal plan of what you would do

if the aircraft came overhead?

Mrs. Owen No, I think probably I was just sufficiently independent minded that I wasn't going to do any of the things that were suggested! (laughing)

I think it was suggested to all of us that we have a place where we could go and I don't remember ever doing anything to make the basement particularly receptive to us. It was continually suggested to us that we lay in a stock of supplies, groceries, and things of that sort. Many people had vast amounts stowed away. I think I always thought I would take what came when it came, so I was not particularly fore-handed in making arrangements for those days.

Q. Did you know right off that your husband would be enlisting and wanting to go overseas?

Mrs. Owen Well, he had wanted to go. He regretted the fact that he wouldn't be going into the war. He had always regretted the fact that, although he was in World War I, he wasn't able to go overseas. After Pearl Harbor and after he found out about military government, he then decided that he would apply immediately for military government and so I knew from then on. I don't remember that he had ever talked about it before Pearl Harbor, but when we were officially in the war and it had been officially announced that there would be a Military Government Division, then he decided to apply for that.

Q. You were then a wife waiting at home for news of her husband. Did the mails supply you with enough? Were they censored? Were you afraid for him?

Mrs. Owen No, I wasn't afraid for him because he wasn't on active duty. He was stationed in England for about a year, part of the time in a small town outside of London. Just before D-Day, he wrote me that he was standing about four feet from a Very Important Person - that was all he could say, you see - the important person proved to be [the man who would later be] President Eisenhower.

I didn't fear for him for the reason that he wasn't really close to battle lines. He really went onto active duty in military government after the war was over. I wasn't particularly worried.

The mails came through very well. There'd be perhaps a week when I wouldn't hear from him, but if there wasn't a letter, there was usually a postcard for our daughter. There was no period when I was particularly concerned for his safety.

Q. So your daughter did not experience any crisis in...

Mrs. Owen No, she didn't experience any crisis. I think she went through what I didn't realize at the time was very much a feeling of her father's being gone, and it upset our life. It wasn't the normal life that she had lived up until that time.

I think she was a very sensible child, and she learned to cope. Perhaps that was the attitude of the people among whom she was living, and so she accepted it. And yet I've often thought that, as an adult, I might not have had any appreciation for what she was really going through. But she didn't show it in fears or nightmares or anything of that kind.

Q. Your husband was gone, and there would be things that needed doing around the house. Did that become difficult?

Mrs. Owen Well, it had its moments when it was not too easy. Just before we moved into our house - and we moved in just three weeks before he went off to take his training at the University of Virginia - we'd had a very severe windstorm and about three trees had blown down. He had bought a cross cut saw and a sawhorse, arranged before he left for a man to come and cut the trees up. And the man never showed up.

I, knowing they were going to lie there for the next three or four years if something wasn't done, used to take my seven year old out around dusk when the neighbors couldn't see us and we sawed up all the logs.

That was the kind of thing that you learned to cope with. We were to have a new lavatory put in right before he left, and he had again made arrangements for the plumbers to come. Things of that sort were very hard to arrange. Equipment was very hard to get. Everything was being sent to the war.

So it was very fortunate for us that he was able to make this arrangement with a man who owned a plumbing business. He was to arrive on Monday morning, and my husband had arranged for a man to come and take out some shelves in a china closet where the little lavatory was to be put in. The man never showed up. This was quite true of that particular time. They could get jobs easily, and he may have said, "Yes, I'll come on such and such a day," but in between, he had gotten a job and had forgotten all about it or didn't care.

So I had the feeling I could do almost everything. I wasn't very good on electricity. (laughing)

Q. If the war had gone on long enough, you probably would have gotten better.

Mrs. Owen We did learn how to change fuses and things like that. You had to.

Q. Were you aware of a housing crunch?

Mrs. Owen Oh, yes, very much aware of a housing crunch. Partly because the second year my husband was away, some very good friends of mine, a man and his wife and two little boys, whom I had known for many years, sold their house in a neighboring community. They thought they had gotten a very good price for it, and then discovered that despite the good price they couldn't afford to buy anything else because the housing was so short, there wasn't very much to chose from.

You didn't pick up the Sunday paper and see

pages and pages of houses for rent or for sale. There weren't any. So they came to spend the second year that my husband was away with me, which was very pleasant. We had the advantage of having more rationing tickets for food than my seven-year-old and I would have had alone. And I remember we would spend all our rationing tickets on a roast of beef - it was so unusual to have a roast of beef! You didn't get meat like that during the war. So we would try to decide whether to have second helpings that night, or save it for another meal. We all had second helpings! (chuckling)

But it was an unusual living situation. There's no question about that, but again you learned to cope with it. If you didn't have very many ration tickets, then you got along without.

Q. Did you have some young women living with you for a time?

Mrs. Owen Yes, the first year after my husband left, I was in a fairly large house alone with my seven year old. I was called by one of the committees that was responsible for housing for particularly women in the service to ask if I would be willing to take a young woman in who was a SPAR officer, in the Coast Guard. I was delighted to have the companionship. She was gone all day. She was a very pleasant person.

She was then sent on active duty somewhere else, and three more came to join me. We had a very pleasant time. I've kept up with all of them because I really did enjoy them. And then they'd be shipped on to some other place, so I knew I wasn't going to have any one of them for very long. It was a very congenial atmosphere that we had, and I know that they were very appreciative of getting into a home, rather than just having a room somewhere or something of that sort.

I hadn't expected to give them meals, but at the end of the first week, one of them asked was there any chance that she could have Sunday dinner?

I said, "You can come to every meal you want, as far as I'm concerned. I don't guarantee they'll be awfully good meals, but you are more than welcome."

And we had a very, very pleasant time.

Q. It sound like a kind of communal living.

Mrs. Owen No, not communal living. I was the head of the household, and they came and went. I had to and did adjust to them very happily.

I remember one girl who was a graduate of Smith College, and not out of college very long. Her duty was from midnight to six AM and she found it terribly hard to stay awake during those hours. She would come in at seven in the morning, her eyes just half open because she was so sleepy. She'd go up and sleep for several hours. So we adjusted to that because everybody else was adjusting to it.

I was only too glad to make life a little more pleasant for them. They were enjoying what they were doing. At the same time, it was an adjustment for them, too.

Q. Your volunteer activities were with which organizations at that time?

Mrs. Owen Well, particularly with [Children's] Orthopedic Hospital. I was very active then - in fact, I was president of the board during the war years.

We were very shorthanded at the hospital. Nurses were very hard to get. Many of the doctors had gone off. We had a committee meeting every Tuesday morning up at the hospital - a group of us on a certain committee - and we would break the committee up at eleven or twelve o'clock to go and feed the babies. It takes hands to feed babies. You don't just give a baby a bottle and go off and leave it. It was typical of Orthopedic Hospital that a baby was held in your arms and you fed the baby. That was one of the things that the board recognized that it could help out in doing, just to provide more hands to look after things.

Q. Were there any other changes at the hospital because of the war? Did it become involved in civilian defense planning at all, if there were an emergency?

Mrs. Owen I'm sure it did, although I don't remember the detail of it. Everyone was concerned with civilian defense. We were all supposed to have a plan, but I don't remember the detail of how it affected the hospital.

Q. Were you involved with Ryther Child Center?

Mrs. Owen Yes, I was involved with Ryther, and I remember our being notified that in case of an air raid, or something like that, we were to take all the children and head up for Snoqualmie Falls. It seemed almost impossible when you think of ushering thirty or forty youngsters who had their own problems to another situation so different from the one they were already having difficulty adjusting to.

But you did what people thought was best for you. You might do it with grumbling but nevertheless you accepted the fact that that was what was supposed to be done.

Q. It sounds like a very busy and crowded time - perhaps more busy and crowded than any other time since then.

Mrs. Owen Well, I think that's undoubtedly true. Certainly all the people I knew were willing to help the war effort in any way they could. If it was a matter of serving on committees, being hostesses for people in the service, being hostesses at dances or parties given for servicemen, or abiding by the regulations on rationing for food or gas - you did it. I don't know anyone who didn't accept it as part of a very busy and necessary life.

Q. The influx of people during the war swelled Seattle's population greatly during those years - servicemen, and people working in the shipyards and at Boeing, and then there's a baby boom beginning as well. What were the affects on the Seattle school system as far as you could perceive at that time?

Mrs. Owen There was a marked impact on Seattle schools and the population in them during the war. The birthrate had begun to go up here in Seattle - the number of children born - in, I think, 1943. Well, we knew that five years from 1943, those children would be in kindergarten, so we could see that there was going to be a very large increase in population.

I went on the Seattle School Board in 1945, so I came in just at the time when the baby boom was beginning to be felt. It complicated life in Seattle because the population increase after the war was quite noticeable. There was a very large settlement out in the North End of Seattle, and to the problems that the School District already had with children within the city limits, was the additional problem of Seattle increasing its northern boundary from 100th Street to 145th Street. That took in a certain section of the city that was growing very rapidly. It had been part of the Shoreline area.

We were faced immediately with not only providing for increased population within the city limits as we had known them, but for a burgeoning population up to 145th.

Q. Was there a teacher crunch?

Mrs. Owen There had been a teacher crunch during the war. The Seattle schools had for the first time, I believe, taken married teachers during that time. It was only because of the war that they admitted married teachers. That hadn't been allowed up to that time. But those teachers proved to be so very successful that the school district decided to continue the change in policy and married teachers were admitted after that.

I'm not sure how much longer it was before we followed up on another matter that had been occasioned by the war, and that was the addition of Negro teachers into the district. I don't know how many we had used during the war, but everything had to be done on a more or less temporary basis because the need was so great. After the war, the superintendent came to us and recommended that we again change our policy to include the Negro teachers. I remember well that the Board said they would be very glad to change the policy if the Superintendent would guarantee that the first [Negro] teacher be an extremely good one, which he attempted to do.

Q. What was the racial situation in Seattle just at the beginning of the war in terms of housing and employment and education? And the social attitudes.

Mrs. Owen The social attitudes, as I remember them, were nil on the subject of the racial situation. The Negroes were living in what was called "Coon Hollow," down there on Madison Street, between about Twenty-third and Twenty-eighth. They were crowded, but not so crowded because there weren't very many of them in those days - there were comparatively few in Seattle.

During the war, Negroes came from all over

the country because there was less racial tension here than in other places. They found this was a very desirable place to live, and the Negro population grew decidedly during the war. And here they all still were being crowded into this very restricted area there on Madison Street, and something had to give. They began to spread out onto Rainier Avenue and that part of town. They branched out a bit around where they had been living, but it was very slow. A very slow change of attitude.

Q. Were they restricted by actual restrictive covenants - people who refused to rent or sell to them - or were they restricted by community attitudes which made it so unpleasant for them?

Mrs. Owen They were restricted chiefly by community attitude, plus the fact that I think many of them wouldn't think of going into an area where they hadn't been before. And I can well appreciate their point of view.

 I remember during that time - and I thought that I lived in a fairly liberal community, and certainly in a block of liberal citizens - that I was called one night and asked if I would mind if my neighbor sold to a Chinese and his wife. He was on the University of Washington faculty. I said, "Why, I'd be delighted, and I'd be glad to see, when they moved in, that they met the other neighbors."

 And she said, "Would you believe it? You're the only one on this block that has been willing to accept them?"

 That was the attitude. People weren't as conscious in those days of their attitude of discrimination - they simply accepted it.

Q. What were employment opportunities like here in the city of Seattle before the war for black women?

Mrs. Owen I would say they were non-existent.

 I had been in the business world from ten to twenty years before the war. I had been at Frederick and Nelson. At that time, if a Negro woman came into the glove department and wanted to have a pair of gloves fitted, it couldn't be done. We didn't fit gloves for a Negro woman.

 I remember a Negro woman coming up with a very small child to the Tea Room, and there was considerable discussion as to whether or not she should be admitted. (The child was Caucasian; the Negro woman was its nurse.)

 You just didn't see anybody. You just didn't see anyone. And I can include the Japanese and Chinese, too - I don't think it ever occurred to them to come to the Frederick and Nelson Tea Room.

Q. Did they come to the Personnel Department?

Mrs. Owen No, I don't remember any Negro employees that we had while I was there.

Q. Was that a policy or was it just...?

Mrs. Owen Oh, both, probably, but there was a policy that you didn't fit a Negro. And she couldn't possibly have gone to the dress section, or coats and suits, and been fitted. But that was the way people thought in those days.

We haven't progressed nearly enough, but we've progressed a long, long way from that attitude.

Q. Do you think the war had a role in that change?

Mrs. Owen Oh, yes! Definitely it had a role.

When you worked beside somebody who was black, and you'd never had that experience before and found it was a very pleasant one, of course, it changed your attitude.

Just the way it did in the service. The men who worked with blacks in their regiments, I think, came out with a very different feeling from the one they'd had when they came in.

I think this was one of the great advantages of the war.

Q. In shopping in downtown Seattle during the war, did you have any sense of the community changing? As a woman, did it seem to you to become a more wide open town? Did you avoid First Avenue consciously?

Mrs. Owen I can hardly answer that question... My ways didn't take me downtown very much.

I think we were aware that streets were crowded and there were lots of servicemen around but I don't think it had any affect on my comings and goings.

Q. Did you become aware of those traffic problems?

Mrs. Owen Lack of gasoline was the thing that we were more aware of than anything else! (laughing)

I think the traffic problems then would seem insignificant compared to what they are now when people do have the gas.

I don't remember the traffic problems particularly, but I do remember the limitations that were placed upon us getting gas. I remember getting out at 6:30 and 7:00 in the morning on line to get gas at the filling station nearest me.

Q. How long would you have needed to wait?

Mrs. Owen Oh, I'd be prepared to wait anywhere up to an hour. There'd be long lines of cars ahead, and that's why I went so early because people didn't usually go quite that early. But otherwise, I would get in line half way down the street and edge my way up as each car got a little bit of gas and went on.

We don't know what it's like these days. We may complain about the high cost of gas, but when you can't get gas, it's an entirely different situation.

Q. Did it become a hardship for you? It sounds as though

you coped admirably - did you ever perceive it as a hardship?

Mrs. Owen Well, you planned very carefully. You didn't use gas unless you needed to. I don't remember that we walked so much. I was pretty far from the places I wanted to get to, so I had to use gas.

We were sufficiently restricted that, during those war years, when I was president of the Orthopedic [Hospital], and we always had a number of requests for speakers to go out and talk to groups outside of Seattle, it became a real hardship because we couldn't get the gas. I was the only one who was entitled to it on behalf of the Orthopedic Hospital, so I went hither and yon, and felt fortunate and also felt guilty because sometimes I had to go so far.

Q. What were you speaking on to those people far off? Were you asking for support?

Mrs. Owen Yes, and it was oftentimes people where a child had come to Orthopedic from that community, and they were very supportive and wanted to know more about the hospital and to have a speaker. So for many, many years, the Board has gone out on every request of that kind, and they still come.

It was a request for more information and to stimulate their support. We always sent speakers.

Q. Within a few days after Pearl Harbor, all the Japanese Americans living in Seattle were asked to turn in their radios and firearms and cameras to the Seattle Police Department. And within six months they were bound for elsewhere, on buses and trains. What was the atmosphere like at that time that produced that response on the part of our government?

Mrs. Owen I can't tell you what the atmosphere was that decision on the part of the government, but I can tell you a little bit about what the atmosphere was here in Seattle.

The only time that I was really apprehensive at what might happen was right after the announcement of Pearl Harbor because it was supposed that the Japanese...

Side B

...the decision to send all the Japanese out of Seattle.

I can understand it because there were a great many people here who were actually afraid with the thought of the Japanese coming in from the Pacific to attack the state of Washington and Seattle, or California. Although many people, I think, had Japanese friends - and good Japanese friends - they didn't know who was here in the Japanese community. They didn't know, if the Japanese landed from Japan, whether or not there were spies or whether or not there were agents here who would help them, or what the effect would be.

I really think it was from fear as much as

anything else that the people in this community, for instance, were willing to see this happen.

I think it was most unfortunate that it happened. I think that many, many people regret it, and yet I've always felt that I had an understanding of why it happened because people were really afraid.

Q. Do you think the intent... Well, obviously the intent was to separate these people, but for what purpose? Principally to protect them? Principally to keep them from fifth column activity? Or both of those things, or something I haven't mentioned?

Mrs. Owen I didn't think far enough to think of it being done as a protection to them. I felt that it was done because we were afraid of what might happen if we were invaded and the Japanese were giving information and helping the invaders.

I don't really have a wide enough vision of the city as a whole, or have known about what the thinking was. This was the attitude that I sensed among the people that I saw around me.

We had a little Japanese man and his wife who ran the grocery store where we went. We thought they were the nicest people in the world. We liked them immensely. But we didn't know anything about who the people were on the next block, and the block beyond that. We felt sad that the people that we did know and respect were among those who went, but we could understand why they were being asked to leave.

Q. After the war, did that grocer return?

Mrs. Owen That I couldn't say. If he did, he came back to nothing, because everything was taken away from them. Nothing was returned to them.

Q. I think that's an element that's hard for me to justify - the appropriation of their property.

Mrs. Owen It's hard for many people. Yes.

Well, wasn't it in the last Congress that steps were taken to pay back some of what we owe them, and the great question is how much can we ever pay back to make up for what was done to them in the first place?

Just making a monetary settlement, even though it was an inadequate one, I think was a gesture on the part of some people thinking that it might ease their consciences.

It would be very difficult to pay back what the Japanese community went through when they left. And the difficulty experienced when they came back. People were not particularly willing to receive them.

Q. The Civic Unity Committee was established by Mayor Devin, in part, to deal with this problem. And you were on that committee. Could you talk about that a little? How did you perceive that mandate that the Mayor had given you?

Mrs. Owen Well, I always thought that Mayor Devin was very farsighted when, several months - in fact, I don't now how long the Civic Unity Committee was in operation - before the end of the war, that it was going to be very difficult for the Japanese to come back to a peaceful community when their lands had been taken away from them, when they had nothing to return to.

In the Puyallup valley, where the Japanese farmers had been so successful before the war, they had nothing there any more. That had been taken over. American citizens were not going to be too anxious to see them come back and demand what they had had before.

So the Civic Unity Committee was organized to discuss the situation, to be well aware of what might happen and to try to condition the city to accept those citizens who had lived here before and who might want to come back.

I don't remember a great deal of the detail of what we discussed, but this was the direction that the Committee moved for a number of months.

Q. It was their hope to re-integrate the Japanese-Americans into the economic life of the city? To provide fair housing policies for them?

Mrs. Owen That was all a part of the picture of the great problem of what was going to happen to the Japanese when they came back. What sort of a reception were they going to have, from the standpoint of housing, of business, and of general acceptance.

Q. Did you think there was an element of racism in what you were combatting, or did you regard it as all related to the fact that the Japanese-Americans represented the enemy? Was there a bias based on race?

Mrs. Owen It would be very hard for me to answer that. My feeling at the time was that this was a result of the war situation. That it was not a particularly racial movement - simply good government that would help citizens coming back.

And, of course, they were citizens in the minds of some and they weren't citizens in the minds of other who, as you've said, were regarding them as enemy aliens. I don't think that many people in Seattle did, but I'm sure there were some who did.

But it wasn't, as I remember it, it wasn't a racial movement, as we moved into in later years here, to try to change the racial climate in Seattle. This was for a specific situation.

Q. The Committee had a lengthy existence after the war, but do you think you could say that some of the gains it brought to Seattle, and, indeed, to the state of Washington, in the area of racial equality or equal opportunity were the consequences of the war and its dislocations?

Mrs. Owen I would think that anyone on the Civic Unity

Committee would be much more aware, because of the war and because of the particular situation which had occasioned the organization of the Committee, of racial discrimination and possible racial tensions.

But as I knew the individual members of the Committee, I don't believe we had the feeling that we were going to make vast change in the racial situation here in Seattle. I don't think that time had come yet in the history of Seattle.

It did come later on, as there became more racial groups living here in Seattle than had been here before the war. Housing became more difficult, and they had to stretch out from the area they had been living in before.

It certainly became a very strong issue in the schools. And yet the early school board that I served on was quite different from the last school board I served on, when we had long since come to the conclusion that something had to be done. We couldn't have segregated schools as had grown up, especially with an increased population of all minority groups.

That really set the scene for the present school board and its racial policies.

Q. You were a highly educated woman in an era when that was less usual, I think, than it is now. You had worked in the business world for many years, and had pursued a career as a volunteer and as a mother in the absence of your husband. You saw all around you droves of young women going to work in jobs that were brand-new - they were "men's jobs." How did you feel about that then?

Mrs. Owen I felt about it that it was done to meet a situation. I have never been a feminist. I have never paid a great deal of attention to what the progress of women was. In my days in the business world, we had a very happy time and it didn't bother me to know that a man in my same job would be probably be getting more than I did. We just accepted it, as a matter of course.

When I saw all these young women going into the business world to take the place of men who had left, I thought very little of it. I wasn't far-sighted enough to see that perhaps this was the beginning of a movement that women would want to go into business when they didn't have to, occasioned by a war, but simply because they felt it was the kind of life they would like to lead.

But that all came, in my eyes, long after the war.

Q. Yes, I think that many analysts have said that it's one thing to teach a woman to weld and another to keep her welding after her husband comes home, and also that there was no feminist leadership to pick up the ball, and say, "Gee, look at the gains we've made! Isn't this nice?"

Mrs. Owen I don't know when Gloria Steinem appeared upon the scene, but it was not right then!

Q. You yourself chose not to work for a living at that time

but rather to work as a volunteer. Was there ever an issue in your mind about going to Boeing and learning a trade? Did you ever consider such a thing?

Mrs. Owen I wouldn't have gone to Boeing to learn a trade. If I went to Boeing, I would go because I was already trained in the personnel field.

But I had a seven year old at home, and the two of us were alone. War conditions were different from normal living.

I didn't have any desire to go into the business field during the war because I really felt I would be better off at home interpreting to her what was going on around us.

After all, a seven year old who suddenly has a father who is overseas, and who is living under quite different circumstances than she was accustomed to, must have some inner trepidations and worries of which an adult is not aware.

So I never thought of going back to work during the war. I felt that they could get along without me. I could be of value to the war effort in other ways.

Q. Did you know a number of women like yourself? Did you know many women of your acquaintance who were waiting [for their husbands]?

Mrs. Owen Not very many. I remember two or three - but not women that I knew real well. Perhaps our husbands had met in Europe, but the women weren't close friends of mine. So there was no getting together and saying what have you heard from your husband and where is he and what are they doing and so on and so forth. I wasn't in touch with friends of mine who has that experience.

Q. How did you come to get interested in the school board and issues of education?

Mrs. Owen Well, I was born and brought up on a college campus. My father was an educator, my brother was an educator - I had grown up in the field of education, and had done graduate work.

Actually, when I was asked to go on the school board, I knew so little about it. I didn't know when they met, or where, or anything of that sort. I was asked if I would mind if a woman's group put my name up for the school board as one of the members of the board had died and they were going to have to make an appointment.

I said that it was all right with me if they wanted to. That was my attitude toward it.

Then, I was appointed during a newspaper strike, so there was no publicity and there was no radio or television then, so nobody knew at all what was going on. And neither did I, and neither did I care.

One day I went to a luncheon, and the wife of one of the board members told me, "I think they're going to make an appointment next week, and you're probably going to be it. The real trouble is they don't want a woman on the

board."

The next week, I was appointed.

Q. You weren't the first, though, were you?

Mrs. Owen Anna Louise Strong, who had been recalled some thirty years before...

Q. Oh, my! Well, that's an honorable predecessor!

Mrs. Owen So I walked into my first school board meeting knowing that in the minds of some, I wasn't very acceptable. They were taking me as a matter of necessity, because there were many people in the community who felt their should be a woman on the board.

Q. And then you received a baptism of fire, because the issues were most complex at the time...

Mrs. Owen Well, they were. And they were extremely interesting. The experience that I had on the school board was an education in itself.

A really remarkable one. You feel you are serving all the children in the Seattle School District, not limited to a small group in a private school where some of my experience had been although I had gone to public school.

And the business end of it was simply fascinating. We started out building immediately after the war, and I didn't know about contracts and architects and things of that kind. Well, I was plunged right into it very shortly, and that in itself was an extremely interesting part of my education.

Q. In the postwar world, were you aware of any debate over including more science and math because of the - it has seemed to me that there would be a radical increase in interest in those fields after the atomic bombs were dropped

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Mrs. Owen I wasn't aware of it at that time and I was closely in touch with curriculum changes, simply because teachers accepted the fact that I was interested in education. We had a very, very fine school superintendent who usually saw that some of us met with the curriculum committees that were deciding on changes in our own curriculums.

My feeling is that at that time, our state regulations were more stringent than they are now in English and mathematics and so on. I think they've slipped a bit, though not in other school districts which have held fast to the idea that you needed four years of English and two years of mathematics and science.

I do remember when the first Sputnik went up in 1957, and there was a furor all over the country - people complaining about the public schools, that the Russians could do this, and why couldn't we? The superintendent said to me, "Now we'll be able to do some of the things we wanted to do all along, and the public wouldn't let us."

Q. In the last couple of years of the war, did it ever seem to have gone on for a very long time? Had you expected the war to go on as long as it did?

Mrs. Owen I don't think we had any preconceived ideas. We were so interested in and concerned with pushing ahead. Many of us had, of course, been very much interested in the war effort before we ever got into the war. When we got into the war, there was only one way we could go.

We were particularly aware of what was happening in the Pacific. I remember replacing a mirror over my davenport with a huge map so I could mark in pins how much progress we were making across the Pacific.

This was the feeling that we had. I don't know anyone who questioned the length of the war - that it had gone on longer than we expected. I didn't know enough about it, probably. But everyone I knew was just terribly concerned with how it was going, and what progress we were making.

Q. Your husband's war ended a few months earlier than the Pacific war. The Germans surrendered before the Japanese...

Mrs. Owen Yes, but then he stayed over, you see, as a part of military government to govern Austria in the postwar period.

Q. How long was he there?

Mrs. Owen I think he came home sometime in 1946 - the latter part.

Q. So you had been alone for a considerable length of time.

Mrs. Owen Yes, it was between two and three years, because he left in 1943.

Q. In your partnership as a husband and wife, did you end up postponing any events or deferring any activities because of the war? Did it make a bump in your lives?

Mrs. Owen It probably made a bump in our lives, but we took it in stride. We were both so very much interested in the war effort. Before he went into the war, he was the regional head of the [Office of] Price Administration here, so we were wrapped up in rationing and price restrictions. It was just all a part of the war, of which we were an element.

Q. Did you find that you began to cook differently, because of the war? You mentioned earlier that it was difficult to get a roast.

Mrs. Owen Oh, yes, I'm sure we did. I don't remember the detail of it at all. I wish I did...

Q. I think of that household you had from time to time - it

must have made for some interesting meals.

Mrs. Owen No, it made for very uninteresting meals! I was horrified to discover that one of the three girls who was living with me was a home economics expert! She taught me how to make an apple pie before she left!

 You cooked and ate very simply. You didn't have, and there weren't in the stores, the little luxurious additions to make a meal particularly appetizing. You just ate very simple food. We were encouraged to raise our own vegetables in our gardens. Meat was very hard to get. You couldn't spend enough gasoline to go down to the [Pike Place] Market to get a fish or something of that kind.

 We lived very simply.

Q. Did you find that your entertaining habits changed? I know your husband was gone for part of the time. Did you tend to go out to restaurants?

Mrs. Owen Oh, no, never! We weren't in the restaurant-eating era anyway. People just didn't go out as much in those days as they do now. We never went out to restaurants - he would much prefer to eat at home and so would I. I wouldn't say it changed our entertaining pattern because we were both tremendously involved. He was awfully busy in what he was doing, so we went along much the same as usual.

 After he left, with people living with me who hadn't lived with me before, and who were being shipped off every three or four months, and my taking on others, and then for the last year, taking in a family, I can't say that we did very much entertaining.

Q. I don't suppose you needed to.

Mrs. Owen We just had an awfully good time!

Q. Well, this is an enormous question, but it's the last one. And that is, What would you say was the impact of World War II in Seattle?

Mrs. Owen You mean as far as changing Seattle itself?

Q. Yes.

Mrs. Owen Well, I could say a lot of things. The increase in population, the beginning of an awareness of the racial climate...

 I'm sure, although I didn't see it here in Seattle particularly, that medicine took a long step forward as a result of World War II. I knew that more or less through friends and relatives who were in that field. I remember a cousin who, on his way to the Pacific, said, "I'll probably look after nothing but flu and runny noses." He was plunged into the center of all sorts of things, in the Pacific, with all of the casualties and need for good medicine there. He was operating by candlelight and everything else.

I think it had a tremendous impact on the world, as far as medicine went.

I hope that out of it came an awareness of people, much more of an awareness of people, and that there was more of a breakdown [of racial prejudice], not during the war or right after the war, but perhaps in the minds of some, an awareness of the rights of the Japanese, and an awareness of Negroes because you had either been in the service beside one or worked beside one. And that here in Seattle, we might have become convinced that the city was a little better off for realizing that people are individuals.

I can't say that I could put my finger on any one thing that was a specific result of the war, but I'm sure that it made a lasting impression on Seattle.