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Lowell Thomas Sr. - Remembrances of "His Old Days" In Alaska: Fairbanks-Valdez Trail Trip with Bobby Sheldon And Bishop Rowe. Trip To Prince William Sound With Bishop Rowe And General Richardson. Ship "Yukon", Dan Gilmore. KUAC

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Notes: Originals on 7 inch reels. Master copies on CD.

A test recording plays.

Lowell Thomas, Sr. speaks, full transcript:

Hello, everybody. I understand this program is mainly to the people who live in the neighborhood of Fairbanks, or, shall we say between Nenana and North Pole. I've been asked to say something about "the good old days" when I was here long, long ago. Actually, I very seldom ever meet anyone here in Alaska who is in the north in the days when I was first here. That was way back in 1914 and again in 1915. The only one I can think of at present who might be here in Alaska today is my old friend and pal Bobby Sheldon. I think Bobby in later years was prominent in Fairbanks as the postmaster. I always figured that Bobby should have been governor of Alaska. I made a rather memorable trip with Bobby out over the famous Fairbanks-Valdez trail. And it was just a trail, not a road. That was back in the days when Bobby was interested in tinkering with automobiles. If you have been out to the University of Alaska museum, and I presume you all have, you undoubtedly have seen the car that Bob Sheldon built himself – all of it. Well, long, long ago, nearly sixty years it is now, I paid Bobby Sheldon one hundred bucks to take me out over the Valdez trail in one of the first model-T Fords that was brought into the north country. And Bobby has laughed a great deal over this since that time because he admits that he should have paid me because we had difficulty with his car, or rather with the trail and I had to push him part of the way.

My companion on that journey was a man who was famous those days in Alaska. In fact, I believe you can say that he was the most famous man in the north of that era, with the possible exception of one other. His name was Bishop P.T. Rowe, bishop of the Episcopal church. He was a real red-blooded, two-fisted man. You would find him in a bar with his foot on the rail talking to the old timers. And they were all fond of Bishop Rowe. He was with me on that journey out from Fairbanks to Valdez. One thing I remember about it was that we were nearly devoured by mosquitoes. Of course we had big head nets and we had gauntlet gloves that were tied tight at our wrists, but even so the mosquitoes were there by the billions. And while we were pushing Bobby's car along, oftentimes I would reach up on Bishop Rowe's back and I would break off those mosquitoes by the thousands.

I mentioned that he was perhaps one of the two most famous men in the north of that particular era. The other one I was thinking of was an army officer named Dick Richardson(?). I believe he was a major, he might have been a colonel by then, but later on in WWI, as all Alaskans of long ago would know, he became a famous general in that war. And he led our forces that were sent into northern Russia. General Dick Richardson: the man for whom the Richardson trail was named. And I guess there is a Fort Richardson. Dick Richardson laid out many of the trails in Alaska of that era. He was a great character. Incidentally, he was not exactly a small man. I think he was about six feet one. Very broad, probably weighed around three hundred pounds or more and I recall after we came out over the trail, I made a journey over Prince William Sound in a storm on a rather small vessel with General Dick Richardson and in those days he loved his liquor. And the bishop [the general?] in this storm lost his balance and went down on the floor and he was rolling around in the mess room. And I can still see him there on the floor looking up at me and the remark he made, which was "My boy, never look upon wine when it is red." I am not sure that I have taken his advice too literally.

I could go on talking about my experiences in Alaska from now until, well, until almost Kingdom Come. So, I'll simply add a footnote to the effect that that was nearly 60 years ago.

In those days, there were no railway lines in the north – oh yes, there was – there was the White Pass of Yukon, of course, that went from Skagway over the pass to Whitehorse. But, the sternwheelers were operating up and down the Yukon. And if you lived in Alaska at that era and you had enough money to get on the outside in the winter, you usually did. And I made a trip out from St. Michael at the mouth of the Yukon aboard the last ship out before the ice came in. And that was great fun because the ship's company, all those on board - and it was crowded - all those on board were old timers. Incidentally, well that isn't quite true – they were not quite all old timers because there was a professor of geology from Vassar College. And he had eleven Vassar girls along with him. Lovely gals, they were. I was rather enamored of one blond and had been following her around here in the north. So, some of the others on board the ship got together and they had a little conspiracy and they had the United States Marshal from Nome go up on the hurricane deck one evening when I was watching the sun set over Bering Sea with this lovely gal, Al MacIlravie(?), and the marshal slapped some handcuffs on me, much to her astonishment and mine, too. Took me downstairs and I found everyone on board was assembled in the main salon. And they had a trial. They tried me for, well, all sorts of things, but mainly I was charged with breach of promise by a young fellow from New York who had been dressed up to look like a woman of the demimonde and he charged me with breach of promise. Made all sorts of outlandish statements concerning my behavior in Alaska. And we had a great trial. The prosecutor was Gilmore – was it Dan Gilmore from Nome? - the United States attorney for the north. He was a brilliant speaker. And the lawyer for the defense who was supposed to be defending me, but he was rather feeble, was one of the tourists. Anyhow, they found me guilty and the judge - who was the US judge from the north in Alaska - he fined me a box of candy for every woman on board at the first port of call. We didn't stop at Dutch Harbor on our way through the Aleutians. Our first stop was Cordova. And I was about broke by then. I had spent all my money in the north and had almost nothing left. But I went ashore to a store in Cordova and I bought up a lot of hard candy and I got a lot of empty boxes and I put one piece of candy in each box. And that was the way I paid off this thing.

There was another little sideline on it, which doesn't amount to anything of course, but the professor from Vassar was rather concerned about this girl. He knew that she was already supposed to be engaged. She hadn't told me this. But the professor sent a radio message from the ship to her family in Terry Town, NY telling her family that there was grave danger of their daughter doing something that might displease them. She might be breaking her engagement. So when the ship arrived at Seattle, there on the dock were her parents and her fiancé. And that was the last I ever saw of her.

Anyhow, I have been coming back and forth to the north now for a long, long time. And Alaska is one of my favorite places. At present, I am up here visiting the old junior and his wife, Tey(?), and our two grandchildren, Anne(?) and David(?). I have been coming up now – well, a number of times almost every year. I don't very often get to Fairbanks. Incidentally, some years ago we did stop off in Fairbanks and we were delayed in Fairbanks by that canopy of ice, those particles of ice, that sometimes hang over Fairbanks. And we were held up for nearly a week in your fair city and had a glorious time with a lot of our old friends.

I remember that it got a little bit cold. The temperature dropped down to I think something like 70° below in Fairbanks and we were told that it was as low as 75° a few miles outside the city.

Well, I think I'll sign off now and simply say that I still come to Alaska as often as I can. And if anyone happens to see John Teal, who is the expert on the muskox, I wish they would salute John for me. If anyone happens to see the distinguished president of University of Alaska, why, the same to him and to Bill Snedden(?), publisher of one of my favorite newspapers. And so on and so on. And especially to Bobby Sheldon if he happens to be around. And so long until tomorrow.

Collin Cooper, KUAC TV channel nine, thanks Mr. Thomas.