

02-00-113 SIDE A

Pioneers of Alaska Convention, Helen Keith interviewed by Frank Young

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Series: Harrie Hughes Collection

Notes: Original on 3-inch reel, master copy on CD

Harrie Hughes introduces the recording in which they are at the Pioneers of Alaska Convention in Anchorage. Harrie, Andrew Wicken, Jimmy McDonald and George Bojanich had breakfast at 7am at the Hotcake House. Sourdough hotcakes were from a starter that was from the Miller House on Steese Highway and 70-years old. After breakfast, they wandered up town and met all the politicians. Harrie went to Westward Hotel and met pioneers and politicians there: Bob Johnson, Bob Parish, Warren Taylor and whole a lot of people. Harrie went to the business session, which was quite a speedy one. Committee reports were turned in. Then they recessed. [Break in the recording.] One other thing: They went to Community Hall and heard a talk by General Mondy on communism. They also had a history of oil and gas exploration in Alaska. After that they went to the Pioneer Hall and had a cocktail party. Then they will have a dance at the Elk's Lodge. Now they are at the room with Laura Thomas and Andy Wicken. Andy says they should go to the cocktail party now. [Break in the recording.]

Harrie says there was a little incident while Jimmy McDonald and Harrie Hughes were sitting in the bar. They found Governor Egan sneaking in the bar. [Harrie Cardinal talks something unclear.] William Burns and Art Laughie [possibly Laffey? sp?] introduce themselves. [Break in the recording.] Heinie Snyder [sp?] introduces himself. He is the past grand president and assistant historian. He is 75 years old and he was born in 1886. [Break in the recording.]

At 4:21 Harrie asks somebody what kind of a uniform he is wearing and he says [unclear]. [Unclear talking.] [Break in the recording.]

Recording resumes with music. [Harrie is presumably recording at the Pioneers of Alaska Grand Convention. Break in the recording, after which music resumes.] Sound like Pioneers are singing songs.

At 20:53 talking resumes but the recording is of bad quality and the content of discourse is indiscernible. [Break in the recording, followed by more music.] [Unclear talking.] Harrie is talking with somebody who is 60-years old, which is followed by more music and singing along. [Break in the recording.]

At 31:19 Harrie says it's October 27th, 1961 in Fairbanks, Alaska. Harrie is visiting Mr. and Mrs. Keith [sp?], former Miss. Helen Husack and Frank Young, her brother. Marshal Keith introduces himself and his wife Helen who was previously married to Alex Husack whom they are going to talk about tonight. Frank says he's Helen's brother and he's trying to get early day history about pioneer farmer of 74th Division, Alex Husack. Helen Keith introduces herself too and says that her father's name was Francis A. Young and her mother's name was Margaret Young. She was born in Skagway, Alaska, in 1904 on April 14th. She was about 2 years old when she came to Fairbanks. Harrie says to Helen that they'd like her to talk about Alex Husack and his life. [Unclear talking.]

Alex was born in Poland and he came to United States when he was 17. Helen spells the name of Alex's home town: Podhajce. He was born in March, 1890. He stayed two years in the States and then came north. He came from Tacoma, Washington to Valdez and walked the old Valdez trail to Fairbanks. He went to work at the mines and returned to States in the winter because he was told it got so cold that he'd freeze to death. The next spring he came back and walked in, staying working in the mines for 2 years. He bought a team of horses and started hauling wood for the mines at the Last Chance, Fairbanks Creek, and Pedro Creek. He did that for a few years and got more horses. All the mines had wooden boilers. Then he came into Fairbanks and contracted the NC-Company to finish all the wood for the boilers. He had wood cutters at Steel Creek and he would do hauling with 6 to 8 horses. In 1920 he started farming at old Ballaine's place close to the University. He rented that and farmed there for 2 summers after which he moved into old Jim McIntyre's place which [unclear]. Helen's son Jack lives there now. They farmed there for 20 years, growing mostly potatoes and grain. They sold the produce to local stores, restaurants and people. When the military moved in they couldn't furnish the market. They needed all they could raise and more. [Unclear question.] Helen says: Potatoes, 250-300 tons. [Another unclear question.] Helen answers that he [Alex] was always experimenting with grains and potatoes. He brought potatoes from Canada to see how they work and he was always trying to work with different grains to find suitable ones for this climate. He worked with the experimental station, [with] Dr. Gasser [probably George Gasser]. He didn't work out there [at the Experimental Farm] but collaborated with them. [Unclear question.] Jim McGrath and Frank Burkhard [Burkhardt? sp?]. Frank [?] asks if they had any

chickens and Helen tells that they always had horses, pigs, chickens and a cow. The whole farm was 320. [Break in the recording.]

At 38:00 Frank says that during this period Alex was collaborating with the Department of Agriculture and local University. Helen says he was the first one to take samples of soil and take them to Seattle to be analyzed. He did that to find out what fertilizers he needed for different kinds of soil. That improved his results compared to other people's crops and so other farmers started using fertilizers based on the soil too. The potatoes were of better grade. Alex shared knowledge willingly with others.

Frank asks about Alex's involvement with Aurora Lodge and the Co-op. Helen says he was the first one to sign up for the Golden Valley to "come in here" and was in the board of directors for quite a while. He was also one of the first ones to start a Tanana Valley Farmer's Co-op and was a director of that until he died. Frank asks if Alex and Helen had the first phone on the Farmer's Loop Road. Helen says that they did and that Alex had to put in his own pole. He and Charlie McGrath and Herb [unclear] cut the pole and furnished their own wires and transformers and then the city gave them the service out there. Harrie [?] asks if NC-Company still owned the [power] plant or if the City had taken over the utilities. Helen says the NC must still have owned it. Frank says Helen told him one time about how Alex cut all the poles for the completion of the lines over the Canadian border. She says it was in 1943 when he took a contract to take poles out from Fairbanks to Canadian Border. He had horses, one small Cat [Caterpillar machine] and a crew of men to cut them out and then he moved onto the next batch. They had a small wannigan that they hauled with them. They had bunks in it. One time they ran out of horse feed and the army had to fly hay to the camp. Helen wasn't with them on that trip. Harrie says that was known as the Army Communications system.

41:45 Frank asks Helen about some of the pioneer farmers on the Farmer's Loop Road. He asks if she knew Seacott [sp?]. Helen says she remembers him. His name was Cyprian Seacott. She also remembers Cloth [maybe Claude? sp?] Johnson and says that they worked back and forth: Alex did work for him and he for them. Helen lists the farmers: George Danis who was Lou Joyce's [sp?] brother-in-law, Burke Timble [sp?], Cox and Jordan and Dave Atwell and another one she can't recall. Frank asks about the days when they first move to the farm: the "Farm Loop" didn't go all the way around to the University and College? It was just two muddy ruts. Frank tells about a time when he spent 5 or 6 hours going from town to the farm in an old Chevrolet car. Helen says it was 5 miles from the post office to their gates and they figured it was a good day's trip those days.

Frank says they are going to pave the Farmer's Loop Road and straighten it also. He says that from all the history they know about Alex, it seems like he was a far-sighted man. He bought Husack acres with the idea in mind that it would become successful housing development. Helen says that his main idea was to farm, but he had a portion surveyed into acre lots for housing development. That was 12 years ago. Frank says that was when everybody out at the Farmer's Loop were out in the wilderness. Frank says he could see the development of Fairbanks to the point where that could be an urban development area. Helen says that Alex told her many times that someday that farm will be in the city, and that Fairbanks would grow to such an extent that the farm would be right in the city.

Frank asks Helen about the crowded living conditions that they had when they first started living at the farm, and if they had a well or any modern conveniences. They had none whatsoever. They hauled their water and in summertime they used rainwater from their roof. They had a gas lantern for light and no bathroom facilities. Harrie asks Helen to tell what she did on a typical day. She tells they got up around 5:30 in the morning and the first thing was to make sourdough hotcakes with which they ate their own bacon and fresh eggs and milk. Then Alex went to the fields and Helen hauled water if she wasn't too busy. Sometimes she helped at the garden. Frank asks if they had the roadside vegetable garden, but Helen says that that came later when they started growing more vegetables. They bought their groceries in bulk so they didn't have to make so many trips to the store. Helen says she did cooking and washing and they always had a big crew in spring and fall. Helen talks about the growing season: They had 100 days from planting to harvesting. Their help was local, both men and women. Their neighbors helped too as Harrie suggests.

At 47:51 Frank asks if they got soldiers to help them with their harvest when the military moved in. She says they had almost entirely soldiers. They sent a word about how many men they needed for the day and they sent a new crew every day, giving all the boys the chance to make that money. Frank asks if they raised pigs for commercial sales or just for their own consumption. Helen says he raised pork for sale and that he got garbage from Ladd Field to feed them at first but later on they got it from Site-2.

Frank says that at the time their only power on the fields was horses and asks where they got the horses. Helen tells that they were shipped in from the States. Sometimes Alex would ship them himself and sometimes he bought them from Creamers. He told Helen once that he had 42 horses buried at the corner of the field. Frank asks about the cow, and if it was for their own use. It was for milk and they had a few chickens. Helen's family consisted of her mother and two children.

They also had Tony Grigola [sp?] living with them for 20 years. Now he's at Pioneer Home in Sitka.

Harrie asks about their evening routines. Helen tells that they had a big table loaded with plenty of fresh vegetables and either fresh pork or chicken or moose meat and all kinds of fresh vegetables. Frank asks if they did lots of canning and Helen tells they canned vegetables. They had moose and caribou every winter and Helen went to those hunts in winter with Alex and Jack. Alex or Jack did the killing. When they first moved to the farm, there were lots of rabbits and grouse. They could just walk out to the road early in the morning and get all the grouse they wanted. They never saved the rabbit fur. During the geese and crane migrations, their grain fields were full of fowl. Frank asks if they ate those too. [Helen doesn't answer.] Frank says that it's legal to shoot crane again, and it's not like before when one had to sneak behind a bush for 14-hours.

At 51:47 Frank asks about the cabbage that they planted for sauerkraut. Helen tells that the last year they planted cabbage, they had 10,000 heads. What they couldn't sell they made into sauerkraut that he put in 50-gallon barrels. Frank asks if he sold it and Helen says he did to the people in town and to grocery stores. Frank says they had trouble with cracked heads of cabbage which was a result of them growing fast. Helen says that everything grows fast and large and that they had a reputation for making good sauerkraut. Frank asks what the average weight of a cabbage head was. Helen said they were 40-50 pounds. Squash grew wonderfully, cucumber too but not outdoors. They didn't have a greenhouse at that time but they have one now. Any vegetable like cabbage or turnip [unclear]. [Unclear talking.]

Helen says they tried to grow corn one year, 90-day corn. It grew and was very tasty and sweet, but didn't grow very large. Harrie says it's the end of the first side of the tape. [Break in the recording.]

Recording resumes at 54:09 by Harrie saying that it's the side two of the reel. Frank says Helen is talking about Alex's experiments. Helen says he did well, especially on wheat. At one time they had a small mill with which they milled flour and made bread. Helen didn't know the people who ran the mill. Flour made very flavorful bread but it was darker and not bleached. Frank asks if Alex grew lots of hay and Helen says he sold lots of hay for horse feed, and that he used to haul hay up the Ester Creek and up the Cleary Summit. They did the deliveries in the fall, generally. During the winter "they'd come out and buy bundled hay."

Frank asks if they raised strawberries too and Helen says they did and that they did very well. They sold them commercially but Helen doesn't remember what they charged for them. Frank wants to know what happened if they ran out of hay in the

middle of the winter. Helen says one could always buy baled hay at the NC-store. It was expensive and horses didn't like it but it could be bought if one was in need. They always had plenty.

Harrie asks if they picked wild berries. Helen says they were always abundant. There were always blackcurrants along the Isabel Creek, plenty of high-bush and low-bush cranberries and raspberries. There used to be lots of salmonberries at the Gilmore Trail.

57:30 Harrie asks if Alex got into other kind of work besides farming. Helen tells that every winter he logged for an independent lumber company for years. He'd take horses and men and go to different spots in wintertime, cut logs and haul them out. Helen went out with him 2 or 3 times. One winter he went to Smallwood. They'd set up a camp and they always had to build a barn. They had some tents and some cabins and no power-equipment. Frank asks how long it took to get the equipment from Fairbanks to Small Creek. Helen says it took 2 days for 4 big loads. They'd make it to Frank Miller's roadhouse the first night and sleep there and then they'd go on. That roadhouse is at Little China, 17 miles out of Fairbanks. It took one day to get there and one to get to Small Creek. The last winter they went up there, there was Bill Mc[unclear], Dan Kelley [sp?], Tony Gwigolis [sp?], Earl Young and several others.

There was Hospital Charlie too. He had worked at St. Joseph's hospital and that's how he got his name. He worked for Husacks off and on and finally died at the farm. Roy Ferguson came with his dog team. He was the manager of Independent Log Company and Helen went back to town with him and stayed there a few days, after which she hired a dog team to go back to the logging camp. They came out last of April and had a couple of rivers that they had to cross with horses when the water was high. The logs came down the river [floated?]. Alex hauled them to the river. The horses were used to the logs.

At 1:00:52 Frank says that one of the other places where they logged was down the highway, at 34-mile and down by Silver Fox [?]. Helen confirms this. Alex also logged at 19 miles up the Old Richardson Highway. Harrie says there used to be trees but that they are gone today, and asks who were some of the people who lived along those trails. Helen says there was the 18-mile roadhouse which was at that time run by the Mutschlers [sp?] and later by Frank Turner and his wife. They'd stop there. It was an old log-structure and it was first built by Ed Sullivan and his wife. Harrie says they later moved to Delta and built a roadhouse that was known as Sullivan Roadhouse at the cutoff. The trail went to the right of Birch Lake and

on up until it hit the Tanana and followed the river until it hit the delta. Then it went on where Donnelly Dome is today, over it an all the way to Paxson -country.

Harrie says that Alex's farming was quite successful in his last years and they knew he had accomplished a great deal with it. He passed away in July, 1952 in Fairbanks. He always believed there was a great future for agriculture in Tanana Valley. Harrie thanks Helen and tells that the tape will be a part of Igloo no. 4's pioneer history. [Break in the recording.]

1:04:14 Harrie tells there is added information to Helen's story and that she will continue. Helen says Louie St. Louie built the 9-mile roadhouse and lived there for many years. Harrie says that the mile numbers on the roadhouses are not always true and that sometimes they are off. Helen says the roadhouse was on the Old Richardson, 9 miles out of Fairbanks. Harrie asks her to tell more about it but when she starts, he asks what they did for entertainment in the evenings. Helen says that they had dances in winter months. [Harrie asks something unclear.] Helen says she remembers the Hospital Benefit that they used to have once a year. They used to have a masquerade ball every New Years'. Harrie says people came from miles around and Helen confirms that everyone was coming from the creeks. Helen remembers when the railroad bill went through and she was a small girl that time, they had 2 or 3 dances going on every night to celebrate. They were at Eagle Hall and the old Moose Hall and at the Masonic Hall. Helen says they were dances, and they generally didn't have food. When Helen was a girl, the celebrations at Fourth of July lasted 3 days. They built a big grand stand where the new bridge is now by the Fairview Hotel and all miners came from the creeks and it was hard to find a room from a hotel. There were races and tug'o'war, even horse races. Harrie asks if the Chatanika Railroad was running at that time, and Helen says it was. She used to ride down to Chena where her friend lived. Her friend's father was the editor of the Times Newspaper and he had one daughter, Margaret, with whom Helen used to go down to Chena and visit an old lady who lived there. That was 12-miles from town and there wasn't many people living there in 1914-1915. Harrie says the town was gradually getting small even though it used to be the city port. It didn't have mining going on, unlike Ester that was 8 miles from town.

Helen says the train to Chatanika was quite a trip. Harrie asks about a person named Frank who had a roadhouse on the Tanana River, 30 miles from town. Helen knows Eat'em'up Frank and remembers when he was going to Nenana when he was about 12 or 13. Harrie wants to know who the boat engineer was and Helen says it was Roy Lund. Harrie asks how [Eat'em'up] Frank got that name, and Helen says Frank could tell more about it than she can. Frank tells that Eat'em'up Frank got his name from when he used to make home brew in the early days and when he

had drunk enough, he'd jump up and down and holler "I'll eat you up." He picked up that name and it stuck so that everybody knows Eat'em'up Frank up and down the Tanana. Harrie tells his version of Eat'em'up Frank's name: The riverboat people used to stop at his roadhouse and he didn't serve anything much but hotcakes. He'd cook a big stack of hotcakes and didn't want to throw them out so he requested that everybody eats them up or he throws them to the dogs.

1:09:49 Once Frank Young asked Eat'em'up Frank how he got his name. He said that if he told the truth, Frank wouldn't believe it anyway. Frank asked him to tell it and so he told that he was ship wrecked down in the West Indies and there was a tree on a shore of a small island there. There was a colored guy and another Swede [Eat'em'up Frank was a Swede too?]. After quite a many names the Swede died and it was just the colored guy and him. He thought that he should "do away with the colored guy and eat'em'up." Frank Young asked if he did it but he said he didn't but everybody thought he did. That's another story.

Harrie says he visited Eat'em'up Frank when he ran a boat there. He was planting his potato batch when Harrie stopped by. Frank says he was quite old and that his real name was Frank Lindberg. Frank visited his funeral in about 1951.

Harrie asks if Frank remembers the other old pioneer who lived across the river from him. [Unclear.] [Break in the recording?] That Pioneer's name is Norman Adler [sp?] and he is still living in the cabin. He moved to the other side of the river and is now living in a cabin that used to belong to Phifer [Feifer maybe? sp?]. Harrie says he was running up and down the river when Harrie was running up and down the river too. He asks about another man who lived at the mouth of the Chena River and whose name was Mark [sp? Martin?] Frank says he can't recall. Harrie says there wasn't many people living on the river because he never used to see anybody, maybe just 3 people between Fairbanks and Nenana. Once he stopped at the Native village at Wood River and there was no man in camp. There were lots of women and kids who didn't talk [English] very well and who were shy. Harrie moved on. Evidently the men were out hunting or trapping. Then he stopped at the mission and visited a priest in Nenana. Frank can't recall him. Harrie says he ran from Fairbanks to Nenana in 6 hours with a load of lumber and two men with their entire luggage.

[End of the recording.]