

Call number: 02-00-126

Carrie McLean

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

The tape begins with a woman wanting to tell how her father brought them “up here” in 1905. The first big fire [in Nome] occurred on September 4th in the red light district where it originated. It burnt the north end of town as far as the City Hall, destroying saloons and much of the red light district.

While the saloons were being re-built, Carrie’s father asked them to take gunny sacks and go behind saloons to pick up [wood] chips that were good to make fire with. There happened to be a big board-fence along the red-light district and they didn’t know where they were going so they went through the opening and found themselves “right in the midst of things.” There were little green houses – rows upon rows of them – that hadn’t been touched by the conflagration. There were names like Lulu, Jewel and Rose above doors and there was a woman sitting in each green house with curled hair down, rouged cheeks and a small piece of black paspartou (sp?) in chin that represented a mole. The children though the women were the most beautiful folks they had ever seen. They picked up lots of chips, filled up the sacks and went home. When their dad came home for dinner that night, they asked who the women were. Their father smiled but never sent them after another sack of chips.

In those early years, even before their family came to Alaska in 1905, Nome was quite the respectable community but there were many women in white slavery. Carrie has heard numbers 100-200 women. The women were placed behind the board fence in the Red Light District. It was surprising how many of those women were married by professional men, by business men and by miners, and who became fine, orderly women of the community. They were so young at the time

when they were taken to Nome that many of them probably didn't know where they were going or what was to be done with them.

3:22 Years later Carrie remembers a relative of hers saying that Carrie seems to be a decent woman and that they always understood that the women in Nome were all bad women. Carrie realized she was thinking about the women who were brought in to white slavery.

3:47 When she attended the International Reunion of Sourdoughs in August, 1957 and happened to be waiting for the elevator at one of the floors at the Olympic Hotel, one of the old sourdoughs said that he had come up with a boat that brought the women to Nome. He was the one who told Carrie that it was 100-200 women who were sold at tremendous price of something like \$100,000 dollars. The man who made the sale was called Lucky Baldwin.

Carrie talks about the 400-Society of Nome that consisted of a number of professional people such as doctors and lawyers who had their families in Nome. They had nice homes and lovely dresses and Carrie remembers that many of the 400's had Chinese cooks in their homes. One of Nome's industrial workers always poked fun with the 400-society, calling them the Tampca [Sp?not sure what this is] Society of Nome. He'd mention them in the newspaper, often in the section for local items.

When their father decided to go back to New York from Nome and to bring the children with him [to Nome], he had seen very little of them in 8 years. He had left for the Klondike Gold Rush in 1897 and was there until 1905 when he came after his family. As children, they didn't realize how fortunate they were that he held the family together and bring them to Nome. Nor did they realize what it meant to be brought to a place like Alaska that was different from crowded New York City where they were born and raised up until they left to Nome.

The interviewer asks if their mother passed away 6 months before their father came back for them. Carrie says she did. Their father met their step-mother in 1910. The interviewer asks Carrie to tell about Jimmy [James Harold] Doolittle and if he was in her class. Carrie says he was in 5th grade when Carrie was in 6th grade.

She can remember Jimmy and his short pants that were the vogue of the day. He had quite a bit of curly hair that he doesn't have any more and there was always a twinkle in his eye. Carrie met James after the war in Nome and she told him that the only thing that reminded her of the little boy was the twinkle in his eye.

8:02 Carrie tells that Jimmy Doolittle came up with his folks in 1900 and his mother took in washing and his father was a carpenter. James helped in bringing washed laundry to the folks and he also delivered paper. Like many children, he helped his parents financially.

Mail service in the early years meant 2 loads per month during the summer months [?]. Before the Alaska Railroad was built the winter mail arrived by boat to Valdez and was taken by horse team to Fairbanks. From there it was taken to points along the Yukon and [unclear] which was the dispersing place for Seward Peninsula. They figured it took 3 weeks by dog team for mail to reach Nome. The mail came about twice a week. [Unclear] was serviced by other mail carriers. [Unclear.] The country was most hazardous during freeze-up and break-up.

Carrie talked to one of the last mail carriers who had the route and that was Pete Olson. He impressed on Carrie what mail carrying meant during those times when he couldn't go over the mountains but had to go along the coast line. If the ice wasn't secure, it was a hazard for the mail. There was a carrier to Qugruk that stopped at various mining camps en route. It wasn't as hazardous as the other route was. Then there was a carrier that took mail to Salmon and Council and way-points. Another team left toward Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, Haycox, Candle and Kotzebue. The carriers just went twice a month and that was enough. Twice-a-month mail service existed through the winter months, beginning in November and ending in May.

Intrepid was the name for the mail-carrier who faced all kinds of weather and had to travel on a schedule. None of them could realize the hardships of the trail without experiencing them. Carrie found that for her, one trip during the winter was enough. Winter lasted for 6 months.

Anyone who subscribed to a magazines and newspapers was out of luck. Sacks of mail were piled in sleds in Unalakleet and the sacks would be taken at random. [Unclear] was lucky to get the package by spring. [Unclear talking about getting mail to its destination by boat.] First boat mail was brought in by the end of May and the boats were loaded with tons of mail. There was also oranges, grapefruit and eggs. [Unclear talking.] The mail that came in during the breakup, in April and May, wouldn't get carried before the boats started running. [Unclear talking about mail.] Even with as much as getting mail twice a week, one was lucky if she got an answer to a letter that was written in November by spring. Mail clerks weren't under as much pressure as they are today with plain mail.

13:54 The interviewer asks about the wireless telegram. Carrie tells that they had that at Port Safety, as it was called. It was about 22 miles "from here" and it was at least an inception of a mining camp [unclear]. The interviewer suggests that they didn't feel quite as isolated then. Carrie laughs and says that they certainly didn't get anywhere through the mail. The interviewer says she has often thought of the poor mail-carriers in the spring and winter [unclear] Montgomery Ward Catalogs. [Carrie says something unclear.] [Break in the recording.]

Carrie tells that when she was in Haycock at Time (sp?) Creek, she'd watch mail-teams come up from Unalakleet on their way to Candle and Kotzebue. The teams were no less than 18 dogs and bearing maximum capacity loads. The trip was lengthy and it was carried on by two mail carriers so that as one would leave, he met the other mail carrier coming from Kotzebue. When Carrie was teaching school there in 1915, she had the children make a guess when the mail team would get in and had a box of candy for the lucky guesser. They always knew when the team was coming because he'd take the Lagoon Trail right behind the tower and they'd hear him hollering at his dogs, and often coming in in a blizzard. [Break in the recording.]

16:21 The interviewer asks about Spanish Influenza. Carrie tells that there was an old-timer in Nome who used to have a hothouse. He had gone to the States, taking a quantity of ivory relics on the boat that he managed to sell. Then he decided to go back to Nome to get more ivory and but he had caught the flu and

died either on the ship or shortly arriving to Nome and some people say that he was the one that brought the flu to Nome. Others say it originated from Fort Davis, 3 ½ miles east of Nome when a bunch of chicken were [unclear, brought in?]. Carrie says she doesn't see how chickens could bring the flu.

Army Doctor, Beirson, was called to handle civilian cases because their AMS Doctor, Dr. Newman was very ill with it. Carrie doesn't know if there were other civilian doctors at the time but she knows that Dr. Beirson was the one who handled the situation in Nome. The Holy Cross hospital had been closed in 1917 but it had to be reopened during the time of the flu because there were so many sick people in Nome. It seemed that they didn't have nurses or other personnel who had been with the Holy Cross prior, so they took the [unclear] folks to attend to the sick.

It was the coldest November in record, -51 below zero and there was no snow to blanket houses. It was dry, exceedingly cold fall, which didn't help the flu situation. Five had died aboard the last boat that left to Seattle and many sick were taken to the Seattle Hospital by ambulances from that boat. In Nome, a number of civilians died in the hospital and in their homes. Many Natives died because they didn't have resistance to it. They'd get pneumonia and they didn't know how to take care of themselves. One even hung himself because of the fear.

A 100-foot pit was dug on the beach just below the embankment where the old graveyard stands. The Native people were buried en masse. There were 2 places that Carrie knows didn't get the flu: Shismaref where Jean Paul Jones and his daughter Holly were teaching. They put a sentry at the east and the west end of town and allowed no-one to come or go and so they were saved from getting the flu. That's why Shismaref has remained one of the largest villages. Hancock was the other place. It seemed that the mail teams weren't coming in and the people were wondering what's wrong so they sent two white men to First Chance to tap the telephone line to find out what was wrong. They learned of the influenza. There was nobody coming or leaving Hancock and so they didn't get the 1918 flu either.

20:38 At the [Tellan? Teller?] Mission, Mrs. Fosell][sp?] who was the wife of the missionary had to look after her family and the mission dog-team that was a large dog team. She was the only one who was not ill in the mission house. The people from the close-by villages all died or were starting to die and dogs got into the shacks and more than one body was dismembered. 75-foot long grave was dug near the mission for burial of the bodies.

Carrie returned from the States in 1920 and missed all the Natives she knew from the Mission and from the [unclear] that she knew in 1915. They were taken, almost to a man, by the flu. Albert [Unclear] was able to travel to a village to see his wife's parents. He found them both dead and their 5-year-old daughter who had been adopted by her grandparents like the Natives do if they have a large family, was in a sleeping bag, slowly freezing to death. The grandparents had placed her in a sleeping bag. Dan Green had set him [unclear] legs, and the father took her to [unclear] but the one leg was amputated to the hip and the other one above the knee. He told Carrie that he never wants to experience that kind of tragedy again. The suffering of the child during the three days on the trail was unbearable.

There were two [unclear] people at the Hotel [?] who were trying to look after the sick. As soon as the flu started to mitigate a little, teams were sent to all the villages to help the living and to bury the dead. [Rustling of papers.] Carrie says that's all she has about that.

22:54 Carrie says they had a storm in 1913 that paralleled the storm of 1900. It was probably as destructive as in 1900 although in 1900 there was far more gold and lumber and merchandise along the beach that hadn't been removed. The storm occurred in October 3rd, 1913 on a Sunday. It swept over the sand spit and Nome looked like an island since the creeks were rising so rapidly. The wagon bridge from Nome over to the spit was declared unsafe and the rest [unclear] sand spit were ordered to hurry and cross over into town. The last ones crossed at 11:30pm and the bridge collapsed [unclear] at night.

The City Bath House that was a 2.5 story building, built on the beach, was destroyed. By the night, there was nothing but splintered wood. Enormous waves

with big rocks hurled against it. A safe was carried for a ¼ of a mile by the surf. 13 [unclear] and 11 pianos were counted from the Snake River at one time. The sand spit and the east end of town got the hardest hit. Some houses were filled with gravel to the ceiling. Carrie says she has lots of pictures of that.

There were electric wires on the Main Street that were hazardous to the folks who tried to remove the merchandise and household belongings from the Front Street. There were no [unclear]. Many of the people who lost their homes went to the States on the last boat. This storm, alongside with the fires, helped in destroying the last vestiges of the gold rush. The sand pit had houses on each side of the Gold Avenue. Some of the houses were nice with running water and electricity. Cold Storage Company [?] had a large building at the sand spit and a part of the building remained standing but a large portion was destroyed. Crates of chicken, bacon and ham were swept into the river and eventually [unclear, laughter].

The waves were so high and devastating that the sand at the graveyard was washed away, exposing the coffins. One coffin was floating down the beach and got into the river and launched itself "here" on Belmont Point. One coffin that made it into the river held a body of a dance hall girl by the name of Gertie who had lost her life in 1900. It was remarked by some of the old-timers that she looked just as natural as on the day of the burial. The body had remained frozen.

26:59 [Unclear], located 85 miles north-west from Nome, the water was hip deep on the low end of town and the people were taken to an old shack on a low hill across the lagoon, which was becoming a mass of big graves. [Unclear talking about the storm.] Carrie says that they received aid, but nothing was more discouraging than the general evacuation of the old-timers who had lost their homes but who would have otherwise remained.

Interview asks if some parts of Nome had ever seen water before and Carrie says they only had when the 1900's storm hit. They have had storms since, but in 1913 there was so much on path of the storm, such as houses on the beach and at the east end beach, and all the buildings at the sand spit that were just swept away. [Break in the recording.]

Carrie tells that she graduated from high school in 1913, after attending school there from 5th grade on. After working in a telephone-office for almost two years, she heard that there was an opening for a teacher's position in [unclear] school. It seems that a woman from the States who had been teaching there a year before was a burden for the village and the school board decided to hire an Alaskan girl instead of her. Carrie spent there 2 happy years from 1915 to the spring of 1917. Then she went out for three years to study more and returned in 1920 and again she taught for 2 years. Then she spent a year down at Haycock, at Time Creek. The following spring, in June 1923 she married Mr. McLean whom she had met in Teller. She changed her vocation and went up to dredge at Windy Creek and American River County and cooked for the crew that summer. They spent there for 2 summers and then settled down at Nome when the children began to come. Carrie had 3 daughters and one son born in Nome and she has lived there ever since, for over 30 years.

30:42 The interviewer thanks Mrs. McLean for the interview. Closing the interview.

[End of the recording.]