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John Whitehead speaks about Alaska's true golden days.

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Unidentified person talks about various activities during the Gold Days celebration and introduces Dr. John Whitehead.

John Whitehead talked about what things were like during the early 1900s in Alaska when gold was being mined from the various streams. It was from 1897 until 1910 that the golden days were in their great heyday. He said he would be sharing some of the characters who came up here to Alaska during those days and some of the problems that Alaskans had. He said keep in mind the people in the western United States were in perpetual motion. Anywhere adventure and profit lurked they were willing to travel. They were moving all the time from one town to another. Coming up to Alaska wasn't a great journey for many of them. Wyatt Earp came up to Alaska in 1897 until 1901 with his wife, Josie. They left San Francisco and stopped at Wrangell. He acted as deputy marshal there for one day. He met someone that he had thrown in jail in Dodge City. Wyatt and Josie were going to go on the Chilkoot Pass, but things changed their plans including a pregnancy. They returned to San Francisco for a year and returned to Alaska the following year. They landed in St. Michael and then traveled down the Yukon River. By the time they got to Rampart the river was freezing up. They spent the winter there. Rampart at the time was a busy town. They met Tex Rickert. There were many other people there that winter. They were always busy. After the river broke up they sailed down to Nome. Wyatt built a saloon. Josie enjoyed their time in Nome, but started gambling. They left Alaska.

There were misadventures on the Yukon and one of them led to the founding of Fairbanks. E.T. Barnette thought he could get a load of goods to Tanacross and set up a trading post. Barnette didn't make it to Tanacross in 1901. His boat wouldn't go any further. He stopped on the Chena River. His wife was not happy about being there. A miner named Felix Pedro saw the smokestack on the boat. He told Barnette to stay where he was and the miners would buy his goods. E.T. Barnette's wife, Isabel, convinced him to leave that winter. When they returned in 1902 Felix Pedro told him about the gold strike. Barnette decided to make a permanent settlement. James Wickersham said there was a senator who might help them out if they named the town after him and the place was called Fairbanks. It was named in 1902. There wasn't a lot of gold in Fairbanks. Barnette went around telling people there was a reason to move to Fairbanks. He told Jujiro Wada to go to Dawson and tell everyone about Fairbanks. In Rampart there were army people surveying a telegraph line. Barnette took one of the visiting military people and showed him a place where there was gold (that had been seeded). People were angry at Barnette when they got to Fairbanks and didn't find gold. They wanted to hang him. Wickersham prevented this.

Fortunately gold was found in the Fairbanks Region. By 1906 Fairbanks was boom and bustling. Fairbanks had about 5-6000 people. Two things were striking about both Nome and Fairbanks. These towns were not the wilderness or frontier, but they quickly became cities overnight with all the modern comforts. Fairbanks had a steam plant that heated all the buildings in Fairbanks. This idea is being thought about during the present day. Nome of 1900 was a whole lot more sophisticated and prosperous than it is today. The leading figures of the towns were coming and going. They would leave during the winter. Isolation was not really a factor up in Alaska. Part of the golden heritage was really a comfortable heritage. It wasn't a rugged isolated time.

Some of the problems during the golden days included the image of Alaska. People thought Alaska was in a land of ice and snow with semi-barbarous people. People didn't realize the great agricultural prospects in the state. They decided to have a world's fair in Seattle in 1905. They wanted to show people what the real Alaska was. Various Alaskans went down to Seattle and planned a fair which would be open in 1909. It was built on the grounds which eventually became the University of Washington. The idea grew and it became the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. It was a great effort in public relations. They had to get the U.S. congress to give them enough money to put on the exhibit. It was finally appropriated in 1908. Bureaucrats came up to Nome, Fairbanks and Rampart and were stuck there in the winter of 1908. They clipped vegetables in 1908 and sent them down to Seattle for storage. School children collected seeds to have an Alaskan garden in Nome. Businessmen in Nome collected gold from every creek in the Nome area. Women's groups were organized in every Alaskan city and started doing embroidery for display to show that they were civilized. There were a lot of marathon contests. Wada was beat by Nick the Greek Dimara. After Wada lost the race he put a note of apology and would have to leave the city. All of Alaska was excited about the fair. It opened in June of 1909.

[John Whitehead shows pictures of the fair site] He said there was an exhibit building that the federal government put on with a great cascading fountain. President Taft came to visit the fair in 1909. Everyone hoped that he would get the right idea about Alaska and make it a state. A large big tusk of gold was made to give to President William Taft. Taft actually suggested that Alaska be ruled like a colony. The tusk was later donated to the museum. The federal government built an exhibit building. There was a mining exhibit, too.

On the University of Washington campus there is still a huge pond that was created during the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. The gold exhibit was elaborate. The gold was put in a huge case that would rise up out of the floor in the morning. It had over a million dollars' worth of gold. There was an Eskimo village created, a copper nugget, vegetables from Alaska and the embroidery made by the women from Alaska. Some of the examples are still in the university museum in Fairbanks. By the time the fair was over almost four million people went through the fair. It was hoped that millions of people would rush up to Alaska and settle and Alaska would become another state.

The "golden heritage" of Alaska was modern cities, public relations firms, packaged tours and a spectacular world fair. John Whitehead asked what has changed. In 1981 Alaska is pretty much the same as the golden days. Residents are relatively rich and live in comfortable surroundings. The modern wealth is oil. He talked about seeing Prudhoe Bay recently and compared it to Fairbanks in 1906. Living

conditions were very good. People at Prudhoe Bay are not isolated. He talked about restrictions in Prudhoe such as no guns, liquor or gambling. Alaskans still worry about the same thing that people worried about in 1905 – our image. People still get upset that people think Alaska is a land of ice and snow. John said recently (1981) the governor of Alaska commissioned a public relations firm to see what people Outside thought of Alaska. Only 85 percent of the people surveyed knew that Alaska was a state. Some still thought Alaska was a territory. Some thought it was a separate country or didn't know. There is still the misconception about Alaska being covered by ice and snow all year. Many people thought Alaskans were different. By different they said Alaskans were adventurous and self-reliant. So the statistics still show that Alaska's image is erroneous. He talked about the way many authors portray Alaskans. Our agricultural possibilities have not been exploited. Alaskans are still as dependent on Outside sources as they were in 1901.

John asked what are we doing in 1981 that is different than 1901. The governor wants to have a movie made about the true Alaska. Agriculture is still being discussed as a successful possibility. There are packaged tours coming to Fairbanks. We are still hoping to have a positive image of Alaska. We celebrate in 1981 what we have always been.