

ORAL HISTORY 2015-18

Tury "Garth" Anderson

November 14, 2014

Jesse Cervin, Ernie ?, Alex Bertram, interviewers

Re: Silver Fox Mine

One of the interviewers asked Garth when his father acquired the property for the Silver Fox Mine. He thought it was in the early 1960s. He said the mine had been originally discovered in the early 1900s. The claims were dropped in 1927. His father found out it was open ground. They had been prospecting all over the country "up there" and went across over to the Silver Fox Mine area. Garth said that they had a small portal in the mine. He shows photos to the interviewers. The interviewer asked him if the current portal was in the same position as the original one. Garth said it was roughly in the same position but different. He shows photos of the Galena ore. They used a backhoe. His brother operated the backhoe. One of the interviewers asked him if that was an exploration trench on one of the photos. Garth said yes, that is where they mined a lot right out of there and they made money on that. He showed them a shot of the Galena ore. He said the best ore of all looked like ground up Hershey bars. One of the interviewers points out Garth's father, Tury. Garth explains some of the photographs. One of the photos had barrels of ore that were ready to ship. One of the interviewers asked him where he shipped his ore. Garth said originally there was a smelter in Montana that they used. After that they shipped it to a smelter near Tacoma. Environmental concerns shut them down. There was one in the Bay Area. It cost a lot to ship it that far. They weren't getting a lot of return.

One of the interviewers asked if he noticed a change in public opinion of mining over the years. Garth said yes. When he was a kid Fairbanks was a mining town. Everybody was mining before the environmental movement got going. One of the interviewers asked him about a barrel down in a pit. Garth said they were filling that one. They filled them all by hand. The interviewer said he supposed the Galena [ore] was easy to pick out. Garth said right and it was easiest to put it in barrels. They used to put it in a pan and make sure it was all high grade stuff. One of the interviewers asked if they were able to make a living. Garth said it paid pretty well. He talked about the old portal. He said after it was abandoned in 1927 until his dad staked it in the 1940s. His father staked a lot of the area around there. They were doing a lot of prospecting. His background was always in electronics. He had read an article once about electrical flow around ore veins. He built a little machine to measure that. There were also commercial ones. He explained how he built his device. He said if you come across some ore the machine will pick up the change in the flow. He said it saved them a lot of digging. They would have to cut through the moss. His father didn't think the machine would work. His father had him use the machine on an area of known antimony.

One of the interviewers asked him if this was when he first started working there. Garth said yes. He had gotten out of the Navy in 1954 and started building his ore detector.

One of the interviewers asked him who had the mine before they did. Garth said he didn't know the name. He said their lease expired in 1927. The interviewer asked him if it was just him and his dad working on the mine. Garth said his brother worked it, too.

One of the interviewers said mining had slowed down during the war (WWII). Garth said it was all stopped during the war. There was not mining of any kind.

One of the interviewers asked him what he named the mine. Garth said it was named Silver Fox by his father. His father was always conscious of wildlife and birds. His father tamed a fox and a couple of birds. His father would always sit out for lunch in the same spot. Two birds would show up and he fed them and the fox, too.

One of the interviewers asked him how he was getting ore out of the portal. Garth said they pushed it out by hand in an ore car. One of the interviewers asked him what kind of equipment he had inside the mine. Garth said they used regular dynamite, a compressor and a Jackland drill. His father was conscientious about using too much dynamite. Garth said he used too much dynamite one time and his father wasn't pleased. His father would use the minimum amount of powder in the hole. They always had to wait for the mine to air out after they had a blast. One of the interviewers asked how often they blasted. Garth said they blasted about every third day. They then brought out the ore and hand sorted it. One of the interviewers asked him what he used to load the ore into the ore cars. He said they loaded by hand in the barrels. They used the backhoe to load the barrels onto the back of the pickup truck. They loaded the ore cars inside the mine by hand. One of the interviewers talked about a widow maker being used.

One of the interviewers asked him if he found anything besides Galena. Garth said there were traces of gold, but it was very minute. One of the interviewers asked him if they worked full time in the mine all year long. Garth said they shut down in the winter. One of the interviewers asked him how many years he worked on the mine. Garth said it might have been four or five years. He said he got married and then his father continued to work the mine. His brother, Bud, helped their father.

One of the interviewers asked who got the mine after they had it. Garth said his father held the claim for quite a while. Frank DeLong convinced their father to donate the mine to the university. His father was paid for his equipment and he donated the mine to the university. One of the interviewers asked what year was that, but another interviewer interrupts with a question. One of the interviewers said Tury was friends with Earl Beistline. Garth said Earl used to stop by once in a while. One of the interviewers said Alex Bertram has joined them and he is another mining student. Some of the photos are explained to Bertram. One of the interviewers thought the mine was donated in the late 1970s. One of the interviewers said the portal collapsed sometime after that. The interviewer said the school started using the mine a couple of years ago. One of the interviewers said mining students used to go up to the mine. Garth said mining students would come out to the mine. One of the interviewers asked how his father ended up in Fairbanks. Garth said his father was looking for work. They had been in Wyoming and his father had always wanted to go to Alaska. They spent a year in Seattle and his father ran into Tury Olson and was offered a job. He talked about the Olson brothers who were involved in mining. His family lived in a tent at the mine on Wolf Creek just outside of Fairbanks. He talked about the cook who was in the mining camp. His father worked there several years and then went off on his own. His father mined bench ground right where Flume Creek comes in. Johnny Fraska mined part of that. They mined that for a while. His mother was the cook.

One of the interviewers asked if there were bears coming around. Garth said there were no serious problems. He said they took off when they hollered at them.

One of the interviewers asked him how far into the portal they went. Garth said they got in 300 feet. His father went off to the side of the tunnel and started to go down. One of the interviewers said that was still there and that is the sump. Garth thought there was still Galena there. He said they found a higher reading at a different location than the original portal. He said that was where most of the mining took place. After the war interrupted their mining his father and mother ended up in Circle for a while. They ended up back in Fairbanks and ran the mine as a tourist business for a while. His father said it was easier to mine tourists. Garth described the tourist operation.

One of the interviewers asked if his father put in the narrow gauge track. Garth said yes they put the tracks in.

Garth said over the ridge from the mine they had a mill set up. The mill was sold off to somebody. It was moved to Fox for a few years.

One of the interviewers asked what kind of businesses bought the ore. Garth said they sold it to the smelter. The interviewer asked if there was one in Fairbanks. Garth said no they sent them to the states and repeated the information about smelter locations. The further away the smelter was the higher the freight charges.

One of the interviewers asked him if he missed working at the mine. Garth said not really. He left because he had to go into the military. He said he got his notice to report to the Army. Billy Barry and he left and joined the Navy. One day while he was on a ship he got a letter from the draft board. They were unhappy with him. He had never told the draft board that he had joined the Navy. When he came home on leave the woman who was the head of the draft board stopped him and told him about the trouble he caused.

One of the interviewers commented how mining hasn't changed too much.