

**Call number: 74-06 PT. 1**

**Heinie Carsten at a Tanana-Yukon Historical Society meeting**

**February 25, 1970 at Pioneer Hall, Fairbanks, Alaska**

**Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen**

**Date of summary's creation: 11/11/13**

**Series: Tanana-Yukon Historical Society**

**Notes: Original on ?-inch tape, master copy on CD**

A man's voice introduces the recording that is made at the Tanana-Yukon Historical Society meeting in Pioneer Hall with Heinie Carsten who is a pioneer miner from the Circle District.

Heinie tells that his mother was born in Germany in 1867 and his father was born in 1868. His father first came to America in 1874 and mother in 1879. She settled in Iowa and he settled in another town in Iowa. Heinie was born in Clinton, Iowa, in the middle of the Mississippi River in Beaver Island in 1893. He came to Washington in 1903 when he was 10 years old. He came to Alaska in 1923.

In the state of Washington, he worked at a saw mill and he also worked in the woods in the winter. He wanted to come to Alaska already in 1908 when he was 15 years old, but his father thought he was too young and asked him to wait for a couple of years. The next year his dad drowned in the Columbia River and left Heinie to support the family. He raised and schooled his family, but in spring of 1923 he left to Alaska. His family consisted of 10 children and his mother.

The interviewer asks why Heinie wanted to come to Alaska and he tells that he had a hankering. He didn't know what he was going to do, but knew he could work as well as anybody. He landed in Seward by boat and took the train to Nenana and there he changed to a narrow gauge train that took them to Fairbanks where he arrived in 26<sup>th</sup> of March in 1923.

3:31 His first job in the Interior was up at Salcha for Jimmy Steward [?]. They were ground sluicing. Then Heinie took over a shovel and a dragline combined and he operated that that summer as one of the operators. He worked for Steward until 1<sup>st</sup> of October and then he came down the river. [Unclear] was interested in Steward. Heinie had a little money that he gave to the office and every once in a while he sent \$20 dollar traveler's check to his mother. That summer he hadn't drawn any money so he got it in a lump sum of \$200 dollars that fall. After he got the money, he went down to Anchorage and hacked ties with the Alaska Railroad.

Before he went down to Anchorage, Cook and Heinie walked on Salcha where they staked 2 claims and bought one. They also took a lease on No Grub Creek and went down to earn money to operate the

mine. They worked there from the fall of 1923 to August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1926. Then Heinie came back to the Interior and has been “here” ever since.

5:22 Heinie married in 1940, 12<sup>th</sup> of June. The interviewer asks if he’s been on his own from 1926 to present time. Heinie says he’s been on his own most of the time. He has done his own prospecting work and the first pay streak he found in 1935 was on Ketchum Creek near Circle [Hot] Springs and the following was over the hills in Salcha, at Glacier Creek in 1944. Then he came back and discovered Lower Eagle in 22<sup>nd</sup> of July in 1966. He’s also mined all around in Ketchum and Deadwood Creeks, and in 1933 he was at Porcupine Creek – Mammoth Creek. Dutch Kid, Dick Orson and him [partnered on that one in spring of 1933]. They built a ditch and hydraulicked there.

The interviewer asks if he found mining profitable in the 1920s and 1930s. Heinie says he did. He was on the Porcupine until the fall of 1934 and from 1933 until 1934 they took out \$225,000 dollars. They had a hydraulic operation with no dredges or anything. After mining there, Heinie went to Ketchum Creek and found a pay streak there on a leased ground. He took Tony Zimmerman there [to work?]. He staked a little ground on Deadwood and sniped there, “mining in a short way.” He had it for 3-4 years and sold it. Then he went over to Bottom Dollar and lost everything he had made. He had worked a little bit at Portage Creek and knew what was there so he went down there and paid for everything he owned with that gold, all the pipe and equipment like Cats and dozers and a dragline. He finally made a washing plant there with a trammel and that’s when he made his best money. He operated it alone.

9:28 The interviewer asks if the prospects where he found most of his money were staked by him. Heinie says yes and that he himself prospected them. The interviewer says there are not many people in the mining game that started in the 1920s and who still mine. Heinie says he was one of the lucky ones in Alaska because the papers say that only one man in every 200,000 who came to Alaska found anything worthwhile and Heinie has found three. Interviewer says that Heinie must remember streams that were hard to mine, such as Ketchum Creek, that had lots of rocks in it. Heinie says that in addition, there was Portage Creek with its granite bedrock that was really hard to mine. The interviewer asks about upper Salcha and Heinie says it’s still there because it’s too hard to get into. He says that’s for somebody with lots of money to mine.

The interviewer says Heinie was into hydraulics where one has to be a civil engineer [skills-wise], and that at Portage Creek he had heavy equipment and that he has heard that Heinie is a good mechanic. There wasn’t anything he couldn’t repair. Heinie says that one thing he did was that when he was in Fairbanks before going to Circle Camp, he built the first dozer that was ever in the Interior Alaska to plow up snow. The Road Commission never owned a dozer so Heinie built one successfully. He plowed his way up to Van [Unclear] Bar and back.

11:51 The interviewer says he lived in various places and asks if he always returned to Fairbanks or if he stayed at creeks the whole winter. He says he stayed at creeks. Then the interviewer asks about his living in Central District. Heinie says he’s lived there since 1940. He has 5 acres of ground there and a nice home.

Interviewer mentions changes that have happened in various facets of Alaskan life during his time and asks about problems in transportation. Heinie tells that in early days they traveled with horses. One of the obstacles was deep snow where they would get stuck. He says he could talk about it all night long and the interviewer prompts him to tell about it. Heinie says that he has more interesting things to tell than transportation. On Portage Creek he lived on just moose meat and potatoes that winter after having lost everything at Bottom Dollar. He got a hold of Portage Creek and started making a little bit of money right away. He had men hired and some stole from him. One fellow got out with \$4,000 dollars out of the box and never got caught. He was robbed twice there.

Finally, he built a trommel which is a rotating screen. It was a 4-foot screen and 18-feet long. He had water pressure there from a pump and he built in with a drag line. The first year he bulldozed tailings away from the trommel and after that he bought a stacker which he used to stack it [the tailings?]. Every year he left a little money and finally he owned the dragline, 3 Cats [Caterpillars], a mover and a hydraulic pipe with all kinds of fittings. He was wise enough to pay for all that. Then he leased it to Walter Roman when he thought he was getting old and couldn't work anymore. Walter didn't make anything either. Heinie still has the lease on Portage Creek, but there are some people from Florida coming up who are supposed to work it. They'll make a little money "if they work it right".

Heinie went over to Eagle Creek. He used to look at that lower ground and always wanted to get a lease on it. Finally the state took it over and held it for a recreation center for tourists for a couple of years, but they found out that there were too many mosquitoes for tourists and so the state "threw it open for relocation."

Heinie and his wife got married in 1966 and while they were in town [in Fairbanks?], they heard that there were a couple of parties going on in Lower Eagle [Creek] and so they went back to Central. Before the road opened up, they went over the snow drifts with a [unclear, sounds like 6-Cat]. They had 22 or 24 feet of snow that they went over. That was their honey moon ride. He was confident that he could find pay there [at Lower Eagle Creek] and so he moved two houses there, two Cats and the dragline. When it melted, Heinie started sinking holes and building a road up the creek. He sunk 7 holes with a dozer and a blade. Then he sank a hole where he had always said he thought the gold was and landed on the pay streak.

16:56 The interviewer asks Heinie to show some of his pay. He says he didn't bring the nuggets with him. [He, however, rolls something on table and says that's his largest nugget.] He found the nugget last summer and says that they just scratched the bedrock. Ever since 1966 he has been making sure it was there and he really thinks he has a lot of money there in the ground. Clarence Berry joined him at the upper end [of the Creek?] and produced \$11 million dollars [worth of gold]. Heinie joined him at the lower end and found the pay at the right limits. He prospected and got 97,500 feet "ready to go to the boxes" [probably meaning that he has dirt waiting to be processed to find the gold] and there is money in it. He has more ground than Clarence Berry who has 2 miles, whereas Heinie has 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles. He has 25-

feet overburden to the bedrock and he's going to hydraulic instead of drag-line mining. Heinie says he believes he has as much money in the ground as Clarence Berry took out.

The interviewer says Heinie is one of the few who have been able to find it and Heinie says there has been between 200-300 men looking for the pay streak. Frank Miller who was at Miller House told Heinie he could tell him where the pay was and told him a location where a miner had found something. Heinie believes that's within the limits of the pay streak. That was on the left limit. Miller told Heinie that Heinie was wasting his time at the right limit, but Heinie tried and found the pay streak.

After Heinie went back to tell Frank Miller that he had found gold under the right limit, he said: "Didn't I tell you the pay was under the right limit." [Laughter.]

20:35 The interviewer asks about hardships on his career. Heinie tells about a time when he almost froze to death: Charlie Rogers and Heinie were coming down from the head of Salcha and when they hit the south fork of Birch [Creek] it was a glacier. It's about 30-miles long and it was pure ice the full length. There was no water. Charlie had 5 dogs. Heinie stripped down since it seemed warm in the canyon and walked ahead of him. He got quite far ahead of Charlie when it got cold with wind and all of Heinie's gear was in the sled so he decided to turn back. He walked 4 miles back and finally he saw John Keggie's [sp?] cabin on Buckley Bar. Heinie was getting pretty stiff already, but knew he had to keep pushing because he knew that if he stopped, he'd fall asleep. Before he got to the cabin, his legs got so stiff that they were almost frozen. When he got to the cabin, old John Keggie had hot fire going and Heinie staggered in. He spent 2 hours over that stove before he could even speak. It was quite a while after that when Charlie Rogers arrived. Heinie lost all the hide off his hands, the finger nails fell off and he lost both big toe nails and one toe on his right foot. His legs and ears were all frozen and that was the nearest day he ever got to dying.

24:30 Interviewer asks about the tough men he has met during his life. Heinie says it's hard to find men that were as good as he was. [Laughter.] He weighed 200 pounds and was 5'11 1/4 tall. It was not a trouble for him to throw a quarter of a moose on his back and go through niggerhead [grass tussocks] flats with it. Gus Heg [sp? Possible Hauge? Haig?] found gold on Caribou Creek and he came down to the mouth of Caribou one time while Heinie had killed a big bull moose 2 miles across the Niggerhead Flats there. He walked into a cabin with a 1/4 of a moose on his back and Gus Heg said with his "singing Swede" -accent: "What in the world are you doing there!" Quarter of a moose was nothing for him.

The interviewer says Don told him that Heinie is one of the most skookum men he ever knew. Heinie says that Bill [William G.] and Eddie [Edward F.] Stroecker know him and that Heinie used to exercise a lot. He exercised morning and night because his dad left them when Heinie was 16 years old and Heinie didn't dare to spend a nickel so he built himself a gymnasium and became one of the strongest men in the west. At Levenworth, Washington there were 500 men, but nobody could match Heinie.

When he was freighting out of Fairbanks, he never used board or anything to get drums down off his wagon. He picked them off the ground and set it on his wagon, 475 pounds. Heinie was cutting wood in

Central and his wife went and killed and moose. She came over and told that it needs to be hauled in now. Johnny Palmer was the mail man who got some of the moose that Heinie packed out one quarter at the time through the Niggerhead Flats.

27:48 The interviewer asks if he ever made any prospecting trips where he'd spent an entire summer out in the country. Heinie says he didn't, but once he stayed about 30 days in the head [waters] of the Salcha once. He went there with a plane, but couldn't land there so they landed at the Woodchopper from where he hiked with a 80-pound pack for 35 miles to the head of the Glacier Creek. There was an old fellow by the name of John Maye [sp? Mayer?]. They came there 9 am while he was still in bed, so they had made it in 13 hours from Woodchopper.

The interviewer says that Don told him that Heinie was a keen observer of wildlife. He says when he went from Fairbanks to Circle Camp, he estimated 10 million caribou. There were grizzly bears and wolves. Now there is less than a million caribou in the hills today and wolf is the no. 1 killer and grizzly bear is the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The interviewer says he's sure that mining in Eagle Summit, Ketchum, and Deadwood Creeks, he must have seen lots of wolves, bears and caribou as they migrated there.

Heinie says that Mrs. Reed has seen the herd of caribou. Charlie Rogers and George Delvy camped at Glacier Creek, near the head of the Salcha [River] and for 11 days and nights there were caribou migrating across the valley and right next to their tent. They very seldom slept because of the noise of the hoofs hitting rocks. That was around 1908 and 1909. The caribou go to calve at the head of the Salcha [River].

30:36 The interviewer asks if Heinie has ever run into some outstanding bears. He tells that he killed a grizzly at Eagle Creek in the fall. He had shot a moose and had it hanging at his 2-wheel trailer and while it was hanging there, Heinie's wife saw a big grizzly by the trailer. The bear pulled the meat on top of himself and scared himself so he ran across the creek. Heinie and his wife's son grabbed rifles and ran there. They got as close as 30 feet from the bear who was laying there and looking right at them. They shot the bear who had already been wounded after being shot with a small-caliber rifle in the shoulder.

Heinie doesn't remember the game warden's name that was at 101 [mile] then. Heinie kept the hide and the game warden dressed out all the meat and sent it back to University of California. The bear was 19 years old and 9.5 feet [tall].

Biggest bear he ever killed was at the Turnagain Arm where he killed a 10.5 foot grizzly with the first shot. There are lots of grizzlies left. They were bothered by lots of bears at Portage Creek and the bears tore up Carstens' cache several times. Once a bear tore up their cache door and when Heinie went out there the bear ran away. Heinie went to bed and while he was asleep the bear went back and got away with chickens, some roast, and some other foods. His wife woke him up at night and Heinie ran out there without even a gun. He thought he saw something in the dark on the side of the cache and turned back into the house to get his gun, clothes, and slippers. While he was inside, he saw a spot at the cache

so he aimed at it with his rifle, fired, and killed it stone dead. He got lucky. He's killed 4 bears in summer time because they tore up his cache. It was several black bears and some brown bear.

34:27 The interviewer tells that there used to be a man called Fortymile Kid whose real name was Carsten and he asks if Heinie is that man. He says he isn't. Fortymile Kid's name started with K and it was Harry Karsten. Heinie knew him well. The interviewer tells that there was also Karsten who climbed Mt. McKinley to which Heinie says it was the same man. A woman's voice says he's at the Pioneer Home now.

She continues that in 1924-1925 she saw the caribou migration that looked like the hills were just moving. [Talking about seeing a caribou migration.] Heinie says that the last big herd he saw at the Eagle Summit was in 1944 and from then on they were 100,000 or 200,000 caribous or something like that. [The woman says something unclear.] Heinie mentions Porcupine Bluffs which are very steep and the caribou go zig-zag, or switch back pattern. Porcupine Bluffs were across from Eagle. Today there are no more trails on those hills. Wolves have killed all the caribou.

Once, when Heinie was at Salcha and the caribou run was on, he found 11 big, fat caribou [dead] and not a bite was taken from some of them. They [the wolves] ripped the belly open and just watched them die.

At 37:03 The interviewer wants to ask Heinie a couple of questions. He says that Heinie was one of the people who made history in Alaska by being a prospector who had persistence and who was successful. The interviewer asks if Heinie could talk about some other pioneers he was associated with. Gus Hank [?] was a miner on Caribou Creek and he was successful. Ed [Unclear] and Charlie Lonpart [Sp?] on Nobro [sp?] Creek had good ground and Charlie Lonpart found another creek too where he shoveled \$500 dollars' worth of gold in old gold prices.

There were many Fairbanksans who were successful too. In Fairbanks, one could sink a hole and know where the pay was and one didn't have to dig like Heinie did [Fairbanks was easy to mine?]. Once Heinie and his wife sunk 16 holes one winter with wood fires and they didn't have a boiler. They rocked the dirt and found a little pay so they had all those samples that winter. They gathered their own wood, too. [A woman says that they have a rocker somewhere.]

The interviewer asks if Mr. Carsten has anything else he'd like to tell and continues on by saying that he's sure that some members of the audience would like to ask some questions. Heinie says he wants to talk about Frank Miller and continues by saying that he met Cow Miller in August of 1933, but had heard about him beforehand. Cow Miller went to Dawson with a herd of cattle and then in 1909 or 1910 he drove a bunch of cattle from Valdez to Fairbanks. They were all around 2 years old, but "when they got to Fairbanks they were all so skinny that their meat was just black." Heinie talked with a man who had helped Cow Miller butchering those cows. He's in a hospital now and his name is Charlie Creamer. Wilbur Jewel is in the same room. Wilbur Jewel and "Old Larry" ran the mail over to Circle.

40:32 The interviewer asks Heinie to talk more about Frank Miller. Heinie says that Frank Miller bought the Miller House in 1935 or 1936 from J. Kelly [sp?]. He doesn't know who owned it before that, but he knows that it was built in 1892 by a man by the name of Miller. He built the bunkhouse and Casper Ellington and Miller built the roadhouse in 1893. Heinie knew Casper Ellington really well. Frank Miller and Mrs. Miller bought the Miller House from [Unclear], who sold it to Madeline and Bob Wilfordson [sp? Unclear]. They ran it for a couple of years before Frank Miller bought it. Heinie says that in the fall of 1923, Mrs. Miller, whose unmarried name Heinie doesn't remember, had married Roy Lynn in spring of 1923 and she got a divorce that summer. She bought Cassier Roadhouse which is on Steese Highway, mile 55.

She ran Cassier Roadhouse and Frank Miller was prospecting on Faithful and Charity [Creeks]. Sam Moe and another fellow whose name Heinie doesn't remember were prospecting there. About once a week Frank Miller went to Cassier Roadhouse and then back to the creek. The interviewer asks if Heinie has anything else to tell about Frank Miller. He says he doesn't have anything more and reminds people of Frank's wrong prediction about the location of Lower Eagle Creek's pay streak. Frank invites everybody to his claims to see some gold.

[Unclear talking.] At 43:29 Heinie asks if people want to hear about his dog [as a response to the unclear talking]. Heinie says he thinks he owns the smartest dog in Alaska. He weighed 150 pounds on his prime and he was a McKenzie River husky. Heinie says he talked to the dog just like he was a human being and he understood Heinie. If Heinie told him to get the shovel, he would get it and he never made a mistake.

Andy Burkitson and his wife came to visit Heinie. Boots was outside and would open the door by reaching up to open it and then he'd close it. Andy was amazed, but the dog was unconcerned and sat beside Heinie's wife. [Laughter.] At one time a man came to Central in an airplane, wanting to see Heinie who was 2 miles back. There was a [unclear] back there where Heinie was cutting wood and Boots delivered a message from Heinie's wife that there was somebody to see him. Heinie was just chopping a tree when he saw Boots with the note. Boots took the note home and Heinie came too afterwards.

The interviewer says it was no wonder he had success in mining since he had cheap labor. [Laughter.] [A woman's voice says something unclear about a dinner where Heinie was too. That was in 1924 and there was an aviator too.]

Heinie says he made 18 trips on a poling a boat up the Salcha. The interviewer asks what speed did he make and if he made any headway with a poling boat. Heinie tells that he left Salcha 4pm in the evening and at 9am the next morning he was 78 miles up the river. He had a 22-foot boat, but his best poling was with a 30-foot boat that belonged to Gus [Unclear].

47:22 The interviewer asks how he kept the pole from sticking in the mud. Heinie says it doesn't stick in the mud and he can pole both ways. He changed sides depending on water conditions. He thinks that 5 feet of water was the best to pole in. [More about poling technique.] The poles are about 22-24 feet

long. Gus Hague's [possibly Hauge] 30-foot poling boat was the best boat Heinie ever poled and it was built by Gus himself.

The interviewer asks if he had a load in the boat. Heinie says he had 1,380 pounds when he went up there with a 22-foot boat. Old Tom Gilmore was at the cabin. The interviewer says that the audience can ask questions from Mr. Karsten.

A man's voice asks if Boots the dog ever carried packs with him and if so, how many pounds could he carry. Heinie tells that Boots would carry 50 pounds on his back all day long and that Heinie has pictures of him. Somebody says jokingly that Boots had 50 pounds and Heinie had 50 pounds and a quarter of a moose.

A lady's voice asks if poling boats had a rudder in the back. Poling boats didn't have a rudder in the back but one did all the steering with a pole. It's a lost art these days.

[Unclear question about when Heinie first came to Fairbanks and got burned out from the Nordale Hotel.] Heinie landed in Fairbanks on 26th of March, about 5pm in the evening. The next day he walked around the town and everybody seemed so different [friendly]. They all said "good morning" to him and that day he wrote his mother that he believes that he moved in with the largest family in the world. Heinie still says that although it's different now. The old farmers are still pretty nice. [Laughter.]

51:45 Jimmy Steward and Paul Eienhart [possibly Einhart? Einhardt?] shipped in the steam shovel that is now in Alaskaland. Heinie helped assemble the machine. That was operated in 1923. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> of April when Heinie was loading crates [in which the steam shovel was transported] over at the depot when he thought he saw smoke from the Nordale Hotel at the 1st Avenue. Then he saw that it really was smoke and ran that way. Then the top blew right off of the Nordale Hotel. Heinie lost everything he had except for the clothes on his back. He had another fellow with him whose trip he paid up and whose clothes he had. They had to buy another outfit from the NC-Company to take to Salcha with them. That was Heinie's first experience in Alaska.

The interviewer asks Heinie to tell more about the narrow gauge railroad. The interviewer continues that one had to change in Nenana [from the standard gauge railroad] and go on to Tanana Railroad. Heinie says he only had that one ride on the narrow gauge from Nenana to Fairbanks.

That year [President Warren G.] Harding came up and drove the golden spike [into the railroad ties] because they widened the road. Heinie says he doesn't know much about that, but that fall he took a ride out to Chatanika on a narrow gauge just to say he rode out there. That Golden [town] used to be across from the mouth of the Gilmore Creek where there used to be a little town that even had a bank. The train turned around at Golden and headed over to Fox Gulch.

At 54:25 the interviewer says that it seems that Heinie knows names of every tributary and every creek in Alaska. He says he doesn't, but only in that part of the country. He knows that part and lots of

Washington geologists come to see him to learn the names of the creeks, cabins, and where they are all located. Lots of the names in maps are made after what Heinie told the names are.

A lady asks how long his dog lived. Heinie tells that he was 16 years old. [Another unclear question.] The interviewer says that that is a good question and that Heinie is approaching 80 [he interjects by saying that he is 78] and is still mining even though mining is the hardest business there is. He says he also noticed that Heinie has perfect teeth that are his own. [More talking about Heinie's good health and good memory.] The interviewer asks Heinie if his health could be attributed to him having selected his parents carefully. He says that's mostly the case and tells that when his dad got drowned, he built a homemade gymnasium where he did lots and lots of exercises, morning and night. [Unclear talking.]

The interviewer tells that somebody from the audience says that Heinie had trouble with his back. Heinie tells he had a disk removed from his spine. He and his brother-in-law were loading ties at Turnagain Arm. Heinie had two wagons and his brother-in-law didn't much care for work. His brother-in-law picked up a [unclear] and let it fall into a tie and dragged it up. It was a big, heavy tie, it was raining and Heinie was wet. He got mad because it fell so he picked it up and threw it on top of the load. Heinie landed up the other way and for 14 years he has had a bad back. Doc [Dr.] Hegland [Haggland?] operated on his back and it's in wonderful shape now. He can pan a half a day without his back ever bothering him. He can also stoop over without problems.

At 58:05 somebody asks about her mother. She was a German lady and Heinie could hold his arm out and she could walk under it. She was 45 years old when Heinie's father drowned and she never married again. She took in washing too [laundry]. That was in Washington [State?]. She lived to be 82 years old and died on 25<sup>th</sup> of June.

A man's voice asks if any of his brothers or sisters followed him to Alaska. He tells that he had two brothers come up and go back. They didn't stay. They were both married. One of Heinie's brothers is coming up "this summer", but he's in a wheelchair. He had an infantile paralysis when he was 33 years old and he learned the cabinet work at the government with which he made his money at Pilot Rock, Oregon. A lady asks when Heinie's sister came in. Heinie says his sister Mary came in in 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1925. She went back in 1928 or 1929. Margaret is living in Kennewick, Washington. That's her daughter. A lady says she worked for Mary in American Hand Laundry.

Interviewer has a question from the audience: What is Heinie planning to do in future? He says it's hard to say but he always tells people that he's going to live to be 100 years old and that he's going to mine on Lower Eagle [Creek] unless the Bureau of Land Management or the Fish and Wildlife close him down. He's having trouble with them now because they claim that Heinie is polluting water. He claims he is not.

[End of the recording.]