

H75-19 Frank Nash
Fairbanks, Alaska
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Tanana Yukon Historical Society

Side 1.

Frank Nash was born in Indiana on December 2, 1893 and grew up in Seattle. He attended Seattle College which is now known as Seattle University. He came to Alaska in 1914 after finding out that a friend of his was moving to Alaska. He came up on the old Alameda steamship and landed in Seward. He spent two years working in the Seward area. In 1916 he started working on Seward division of the railroad. He worked on the Seward to Kern Creek reconstruction of the railroad. He worked from 1916 to the fall of 1919. During that time he put in a hitch in the army during WWI. In the spring of 1920 he came up to Fairbanks to work on the railroad. He worked on the reconstruction of the old Tanana Valley Railroad which was later abandoned. Then he worked on the Alaska railroad between Nenana and Fairbanks. He stayed with the Alaska Railroad and the Alaska road commission off and on between the years of 1920 and 1926. The he worked for the road commission steady. In 1928 he was appointed the acting district superintendent. In January 1929 he was appointed the superintendent for the Fairbanks district. They continued under the war department until the early 1930s when they were transferred to the department of the Interior. At which time his position was changed to district engineer. The principle work in the beginning of the 1930s was maintenance of the Richardson Highway and the local highway out to Chatanika. Later on they worked on the construction of the Steese Highway over to Circle, Circle Hot Springs Road and the construction of the Livengood road. After the war department turned the Alaska Highway to the Alaska road commission they started construction work on the Taylor Highway leading into Eagle. In 1950 he retired. At that time they had constructed that road to Jack Wade Creek. It was later built on to Eagle and Dawson. In the early days the Alaska road commission was in charge of maintaining the winter trails. The winter trails were used to haul mail from Fairbanks to Circle and over to Kuskokwim by dog team. They had to build bridges over streams for the dog sleds. They built shelters throughout the country on the trails. There was about 18 to 20 miles between shelters and they were sometimes used by trappers. Interviewer asked about building docks for steamships. Franks said no not in his district. His district ranged from north of McKinley Park and as far as Black Rapids on the Richardson Highway. Later on when they built the Alaska Highway the district was stretched out to the Canadian border and taking in Eagle. Interviewer asked him about his early years and how many people were employed by the Fairbanks district when he was superintendent. Frank said during the summer months they would have 250 employees. The majority of work until 1930s was done by horse power. The horses were hired from individuals like Ed Follett, Ed Bartlett and Harry Warren who were old time teamsters. Interviewer asked about work crews on the road. Frank said there were tent camps. Permanent camps didn't come about until the late 1940s. After the mid 1930s they used tractors, dozers, pull graders and later on the motor graders. The earliest tractors were Alice Chelmers model K. Later on they used larger tractors. They used the model T dump trucks in the late 1920s. They later used Ford dump trucks that held two yards.

Interviewer asks if there were any peculiar problems for maintenance work on the Richardson Highway. Frank said the worst problem was the permafrost. Interviewer commented on the Steese Highway still in good condition. Frank said it was important to keep the moss cover unbroken. If that was broken then the permafrost would thaw and the road would settle and heave. Interviewer talked about the dike that was constructed at Moose Creek. Frank said it was built by the Army Corp of Engineers. Frank said it cut off the overflow water from a slough that branched off the Tanana River at mile 28. It was the main source of the water that came down through Fairbanks. What little water that came down the Chena wasn't much of a bother. Interviewer asked about how much the Chena was lowered when the dike was constructed. Frank said he didn't remember but it made a big difference during break-up. Frank said that was put in during the early 1940s.

Interviewer asked about the mail trail to Valdez opened it the 1920s to the first car. Frank said it might have been in the early 1920s. Interviewers commented on the roadhouses and telegraph lines. Frank said yes most of them are all gone. Frank said they had dog teams to maintain the trails. They had fifty or sixty dogs at one time. He would buy smoked salmon to feed the dogs for two cents a pound. The dogs were owned by the government. The dogs were originally used by the old signal corp. They maintained the telegraph lines from Valdez to Eagle and down to the Yukon and over to Nome as well as over to McGrath on the Kuskokwim. Frank talks about the winter trail from Fairbanks to Chandalar and crossed the Yukon River at Beaver. Another mail trail went from Dawson to Eagle which was on a cooperative basis with the Canadian government. The Rampart mail went in from Manley Hot Springs. They went from Ruby on down to Nome. Interviewer asked about airplanes delivering mail in the 1930s. Frank said as soon as the planes started delivering the mail they didn't need the dogs. They kept some dogs into the 1940s.

Interviewer asked about the road out to Circle. Frank said it isn't kept open in the winter. Interviewer asked about the highway out to Fox and if it followed the railroad. Frank said the railroad went from here out to Goldstream then up to Gilmore and then went over Stafford Summit. The highway went down Nome Creek. Interviewer asks about Cleary Summit and when it was built. Frank said it was built in the 1920s with horse power. They built from Long Creek to Miller House before they converted over to tractors. Frank said Davidson Ditch was built about the same time as the road.

Interviewer asks Frank about roadhouse keepers. Frank said Walter Preston was at the Chatanika roadhouse. Then Guy and Nell Birch ran it after that. There was also Clyde Areed and Whitey Kennedy. At Faith Creek there was Bob Simpson and Jack Brogen. At Twelve Mile there was Mrs. and Mrs. Park Reid. At Miller House there was Frank and Daisy Ella Miller. Over at Central it was Henry Sted and Riley Erickson. Frank Leach was at Hot Springs. Interviewer asked about the roadhouse at Long Creek run by the Millers. Frank said it was Casa R. It was burned down.

Interviewer asked about the stand of blue spruce at the Casa R. Frank said it must have been planted.

Interviewer asked about the Livengood Road. Frank said it was built after the Steese Highway. Frank said the Elliott Highway was built in the 1930s with modern equipment. Interviewer asked about engineering. Frank said the engineering was all done locally. Hollis Sterling was a district engineer who designed the Livengood Road. Interviewer

asked about side hill cut roads. Frank said it was following the contour grade. You couldn't move the dirt around like you do now. Frank said the longer bridges were built with douglas fir timber from outside. Anything smaller would be built out of native timber and would last about fifteen years. The only steel bridge was the one over the Chena Slough in Fairbanks in 1916. It was dismantled and moved to Nome in the 1930s. There was another steel bridge built over Noyes Slough that was moved to Chena Hot Springs Road over the Little Chena River.

Interviewer asked about the road to Manley from Livengood. Frank said that happened after he left. He said Livengood had a population of 300 people at the time the road was built. Some of the people in Livengood at the time were: the Millers, Ben Paul, Nick Bandage, the Hudsons, Blanch Cascaden, and Charley Lewis. Interviewer commented that WWII was the end of gold mining for some of the smaller communities. Frank said yes it was the end of quite a few of the small towns.

Side 2.

Interviewer asked about schools at Livengood in the 1930s. Frank said he didn't think there was a school at Livengood.

Interviewer asked about Big Delta and the ferry. Frank said the ferry operated under its own power and used from 1903 until the army came in. The first bridge was a pile trestle built by the army at the location of the roadhouse. The roadhouse was operated by Rika Wahlen. The road commission started construction of a permanent bridge over the Tanana River shortly after that. It has been replaced by a steel bridge.

Interviewer asked about the names for Big Delta. The Wahlens place was known by three different names. First Grundler, McCarty and then Big Delta. McCarty was from Dan McCarty and his son who operated the roadhouse. Rika Wahlen operated the roadhouse from the early 1920s until her death. Interviewer asked about a place called Washburn.

Frank said that was on the south end between the Rapids and Valdez but he wasn't sure. Interviewer asked about the glacier at rapids moving towards the highway. Frank said they didn't do anything about it they just held their breath and waited to see if it was going to come over across the river. It had advanced rapidly for several weeks.

Interviewer asked about washouts on the Richardson Highway. Frank said from Jarvis Creek and south there were problems. He talks about one time the Jarvis Creek bridge went out right after he crossed it. He reported it and was told that all the bridges from Gunney Sack Creek to Valdez were out.

Frank talked about the rains in the Richardson Highway region and how quickly the creeks could be destructive. Interviewer asked about rescuing people along the roads. Frank said in the summer time it was up to the road commission to get people out of the area. They did have fatalities at Miller Creek.

Interviewer commented about the road camps. He asked about providing food to the camps during the summer time. Frank said some places would use the permafrost to preserve the fresh food and some times they would hang it up. Frank didn't make it a practice of feeding the public but they would provide food for strangers and most of them would pay. There were old-timers that would be fed, too.

Interviewer asked about the time Frank worked for the Tanana Valley railroad in 1920. Frank said the railroad operated a year or two after 1920 before it was completely abandoned. The highways put an end to the railroad.

Interviewer asked about Cleary. Frank said in the 1930s there were about 100 people living in Cleary. WWII put an end to Cleary and Dome. Gilmore folded up after the railroad was abandoned. Fox was also gone in the early 1930s.

Interviewer asked about the cooks that Frank had in the field station. Frank said it was all men cooks. It was a problem cooking in some of the areas. When there were permanent camps there were a few women working as cooks. Frank said some of the cooks made moonshine. He said there were some very good cooks and bakers. Jack Bolten was one of the good cooks on Faith Creek. He remembers surveying the Steese Highway with Donald McDonald, Ivor Quinbrow, Scott Reese, and Jim Gibson. They had a cook named Jimmy the Goat that finally quit and the workers were thankful he quit. Frank had to take over the cooking. The supplies would be brought out from Fairbanks to Chatanika and they would pack it by horse to camp.

Interviewer asked about O.A. Nelson. Interviewer asked about people that perhaps had left the states and came up to Alaska to avoid the law. Frank said people would take nicknames. Frank said they didn't question people as long as they treated you right.

Interviewer asked about Two-Step Louie. Frank said he was a brother of Blanch Cascaden. Interviewer asked about Sam White. Frank said he came in with the Geological Survey and used horses for the work.

Interviewer asked about hiring hunters for meat. Frank said they usually had someone who could hunt in camp.

Interviewer asked about Nelly Neil Lloyd. Frank said he knew her in 1916 in Seward and operated a roadhouse on the Alaska Railroad mile 45 called Grandview. Later on she went up to Deadhorse and operated a roadhouse for a few years. After that she returned to Seward and operated a roadhouse and tourist attraction at mile 23 which was later called Lloyd.