

Louis Black  
b. April 17, 1886  
in Germany

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Interview by Neville Jacobs  
Fairbanks Pioneer Home  
June, 1974  
2 hours

Louis Black left Germany in 1902 and came to Alaska about 1906. He was a baker by trade and worked in Fairbanks as a baker, cook, and also mined, cruised timber, and worked in camps over Interior Alaska.

The early portion of the tape goes into his life as a boy in Europe and England, learning to "make his way!" He stowed away on a liner from England to Halifax, Nova Scotia. "Kicked off the ship," he worked there for awhile as a baker, then moved on to Chicago for two years; he went "hoboing" for another year and a half, working his way to San Francisco where he was excited by news of the Alaska gold rush. He worked his way on north finally to Juneau and Whitehorse.

At Whitehorse he met a boy and built a boat. Together the two floated down the Yukon. At Fort Yukon, Louis left his partner-- "he was no good, he was dumb!" and took with him instead a dog and an owl he bought from some children at Fort Yukon. The owl was his watch dog--hooting whenever a riverboat came along to throw up a wake that might capsize them.

For four months he "bummed his way" down the Yukon to Holy Cross.

From there he went with a German trader to the Iditarod. When World War I came along he was sent to Bremerton. The military found he had worked on ships and he "became an instructor" on the Iroquois. "All the battles I fought were on Pike Street," he says.

At the end of WW I he returned to Fairbanks, baking, cooking, working at the Model Cafe--then on to the camps, trapping, mining, whatever.

Louis Black

Louis tells an extraordinary bear story. The first time he told the story it sounded much more credible--it lacked the male bear and romantic embellishments he seems to have added in the last three years. That the essence of events has some truth, I would believe because they have remained the same in various tellings--particularly the cubs playing with his feet and the sow swatting the cub. It may not be history, but the presence of the story itself in the mind of an old timer bears relevance to Alaska's life.

Louis continues with stories of encounters with wolves on the winter trail; meeting a herd of caribou; and finally, the tape ends with discussion of riverboat work.

Louis worked as a baker on the riverboats when Harding visited in 1923. He describes the disappointment the crews felt when Harding changed his plans for a cruise and took the train back to Anchorage.

Finally, last few minutes on the tape, Louis tells about an incident when he broke through ice at subzero temperatures but made it into a cabin where he was able to "thaw out."

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Tapes