

Albert Norlien
age 86 in 1974...b. c. 1888
1 tape Alaska since 1907

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Interview by Neville Jacobs
Fairbanks Pioneer Home
June 22, 1974

Albert Norlien came from Sweden to Seattle in 1907. In 1908 he went to Cordova where he worked on the railroad for a year. He went to the Seattle Fair then returned to Alaska, and that is the last time he has been Outside. He headed for the Koyukuk but wound up back in Fairbanks.

At one time he walked from Fairbanks to Valdez in ten days; describes the trip.

Conversation turns to the building of the Copper River Railroad out of Cordova. Norlien worked here first in 1907...he tells how men were thrown into the river by landslides; how men dug the roadbed by hand, and by blasting and wheeling the rock out. A group of twelve men worked together and camped at the construction site. Conversation turns to life in Cordova in its founding year; prices are discussed at length.

In the winter of 1908 Norlien cut ties but most men went Outside for the winter. Norlien went out in 1909 and came back to Fairbanks in June, 1910. He went to Skagway, then walked over the White Pass trail to Whitehorse in order to save money. There were three of them, it took them three days to walk to Whitehorse. There they bought a fifteen foot boat and floated down the Yukon. Across Lake LeBarge the wind blew the wrong way, but they got across the 31 miles in five hours.

The men sold the boat at Dawson and took the riverboat on in to Fairbanks, arriving the summer of 1910. Norlien went out to Dome Creek at Chatanika and got jobs the very next day. The men

worked for wages until winter then took a lay (lease) and moved a lot of ground, but they didn't make any money on their own.

On the Koyukuk, one of his partners disappeared. (story)

Norlien married and had five children--three boys and two girls--the boys all died, but the two girls are living.

Norlien married in 19194; his wife started drinking during prohibition, and he had to divorce her--her couldn't support her and have the family taken care of too. So he finally divorced her when she neglected the children, and he raised them himself.

His daughter had five children and is divorced too. He talks at length about family problems.

End of tape: Back to mining experience. Norlien tells about a time when a mine shaft caved in, burying nine men, including 7 Russians.

Three men were on top: Norlien, Walter Fisher, and another. They went to Ester and got a drill and took it back to Chatanika. There, they worked 27 hours, drilling a hole 187' feet deep and six inches in diameter, to get air to the shaft.

After they got the pipe down, they let soup down the hole, then rolled blankets tightly and put those down the pipe.

Gradually the men removed dirt from the shaft. Walter Fisher, who owned the lease on the ground, drilled the hole and was the first man down the shaft to get the men out.

Mining in early Fairbanks area continues as topic to end of tape.