

Call number: 94-13-18 PT. 1 SIDE A

Name and place: Fred Hupprich, interviewed by Margaret van Cleave. Louella Hupprich [wife] is present in the room.

Date: July 6, 1994 recorded at home of interviewee

Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen

Date of summary's creation: 8/12/2014

Series: Pioneer Tapes

Margaret introduces the recording with Fred who spent his early childhood in Nenana. Margaret asks him to tell about his early childhood experiences. Fred tells that his father came in a few years prior to his mother and that he came with his father. Fred's father's father was a chief engineer on a stern wheeler and he and Fred's father spent the winters Outside. After the second year of doing that, Fred's father decided to stay in Alaska instead. He got a job working on Alaska Railroad and during the winter he worked in the fire hall in Nenana with several other people. They had horses to run the fire carts around and they had to maintain the horses.

02:21 Fred's mother [Elizabeth Rapport] came from Germany around 1918- 1922, when she was 16 or 17 years old. She came through New York and across the United States with trains. Her uncle had been up in Dawson. He and his wife were bakers and they had a bakery in Fairbanks. He decided he needed help and they wrote to Germany to ask if Elizabeth and her brother Henry could come.

Elizabeth's uncle started a bakery in Nenana and Elizabeth and Henry worked there. Henry only stayed there for a couple of years but Elizabeth met Fred's father in 1923 or 1924 and they started a family. Fred has a brother named George who was the oldest and he was born in 1924. Then there was Robert who was born in 1925 and Fred was born in 1926.

05:13 Previous to getting married, Fred's father had started a transfer business hauling wood and ice. Later, when the boys were old enough to work, Fred's

father turned the business over to them and they carried it over while going to school. After school they ate the lunch their mother had made and went to cut a cord or two of wood that they put in their two Model-8 trucks that could haul 2 cords each. On weekends, the train came with a carload of coal and the boys delivered that around town.

The pioneers gave parties on Friday evenings.

6:56 Fred's family split up in 1943. Mother and the two daughters, Martha who was born in 1927 and Betty-Lou who was born in 1933, moved to Fairbanks to go to school and Fred worked odd jobs and went to school too. Their mother worked for the Northern Commercial Company store in the grocery department and then in later years, the two brothers got drafted to war in 1943-1944 and Fred got drafted in 1944.

Fred went to service in Anchorage and the war was almost over then.

8:20 Margaret asks about Fred's experiences in Nenana, such as going to school. Their school's name was Frank and Katelyn School [sp?] and it was a big log building with 4 rooms upstairs and downstairs had a big recreational room where they played during recesses. They had teachers who came from States to teach them.

Fred remembers the mischief they made: One winter when they were about 10-12 years old, they drove rabbits into the recreation room and the rabbits hopped in the classrooms. The principal wasn't too happy.

10:04 Toward spring time, there was a grain field on the other side of the school and before the farmer put in a crop there, the kids dug holes in the ground where they put big gallon cans that they leveled with the ground and the field mice fell down into the cans. The boys got quite a few mice that they took to the school and let them run around.

They also collected frogs from a swamp and put them in the storage space underneath their desks in school.

Margaret asks where the school was located in relation to the railroad station. Fred tells that it was 3 blocks up river but inland from the river. It was where the new school is now. It was a tiny school for the neighborhood.

Margaret asks if it had a high school too, or if it only was an elementary school. Fred tells that the school had all 12 grades. When he went to high school, he did the freshman year twice since half ways through school year they were such a bad lot that the principal, who was also the high school teacher, decided to quit. There were only 8 people at their high school just prior to the war and there weren't more than 50 kids in the whole school.

12:52 Margaret asks if Coghill brothers were in Fred's class. He says that they all were, although Bill and Bob, who were the older ones, were out of school. Jack was a year older than Fred. They had lots of Native children going to school with them too and the school wasn't segregated. During Fred's last year of school, there wasn't but 5-6 white children going to that school.

Margaret asks if the Native people lived separate from the White community. Fred tells that they had a village a little ways out of town. They also had a mission that had their own school with 30 mission children in all ages and classes. They lived up river from Nenana. They had gardens, greenhouses, church and school. Margaret asks if they were an orphanage and Fred tells that that's what it was. It was run by the Episcopal Church with Bishop Bentley. At that time Bishop Bentley was just a reverend preacher in Nenana and ran that mission and church. They also had a church downtown. Something happened to the church that was downtown and they moved the log church down from the mission. That church is still standing.

15:34 They had a sister and also a missionary nurse living at the St. Mark's Mission in Nenana. Margaret says that the missionary nurse was the only medical person in the area. Frank tells that if a kid stepped on a nail, they'd run to the mission that had all the equipment and whose nurse was well trained.

That's how Bob Coghill's first wife came into the country. She was a missionary nurse at St. Mark's mission.

They were full of mischief. They had a place where the steamer Nenana was built, and it was called the Marine Ways. Steamer Nenana was pre-cut and taken to Seward where it was loaded on rail cars and taken to Marine Ways. There was an old-timer Haggard Olsen who was a master ship builder. He was in charge of putting the stern wheeler together. It took him a few years. Most of the lumber was pre-cut in Seattle and put together like a jig-saw puzzle. That employed quite a few local people, including Finns and Swedes and Norwegians. Margaret wonders if the Native people got employed too, and Frank says that lots of them got hired.

18:07 Lots of the Native people were good workers who worked for the railroad. At the time, Alaska Railroad owned the boat Nenana. They worked on the boat for summer and each railroad section had 8-10 people who were stationed on the railroad. The sections were 8-10 miles apart. They maintained the railroad, putting in new ties and lots of the workers were Natives, although foremen were non-Native.

In wintertime, lots of the Native people contracted with the government to go down and cut wood for the steamboats. They had wood camps where the boat would pull in and load up 8-10 cords of wood to burn until the next big stop. All the steamboats did that.

They had "a round robin:" Ocean going steamship would leave Seattle with 50-60-100 passengers and power up to Skagway where half of the passengers would get on the railway and the other half would stay on the steamship while it continued onto Seward.

The ones who got off at Skagway took a narrow gauge railroad to Whitehorse where there were 2-3 sternwheelers. One of them was the Yukon. There were many more prior to Frank's time. They took about 50 tourists on the boat and went down the Yukon, stopping at Eagle, Circle City, and Fort Yukon, continuing up the Tanana River to Nenana which was an exchange point. The ones, who went to Seward and up the Alaska Railroad to Fairbanks, back tracked to Nenana to meet the stern wheeler that took them to Whitehorse and back to Skagway.

21:48 When Fred was a kid, he serviced the stern wheelers. Nenana was never a tourist boat but a work boat. Nevertheless, they had 50-20 state rooms and they took in passengers from villages. That's how most of the people traveled in the early days. Fred and his friends put up 500 tons of ice every winter in a ice house with 2 feet thick walls that were insulated with saw dust. They didn't have refrigeration.

In summertime they furnished the steamers with ice. The steamers had thick walled cool rooms where Fred put 2-3 tons of ice that was used for cocktails, lemonade, ice cream and such. They did that for their company Alaska Transfer [looking at a picture of their truck with their Father, George, Fred and Bob.] The truck was a 1926 model. The railroad depot in the picture is now turned into a museum.

23:56 Margaret asks if Fred had time for recreation, and he tells that they always played baseball in the middle of the street. They had only 3 vehicles in the whole town, and Fred's family owned 2 Model-A trucks, and later a Chevrolet truck. They had a 1937 Plymouth pick-up.

A part of Fred's job was to make grocery deliveries for the NC-Company [Northern Commercial Company] twice a day, 10am and 3pm. The people ordered their groceries from the store. Fred packed and loaded the groceries into boxes and delivered them to the people.

They all had bicycles that they rode around town and they were busy all the time with recreation. There was an old gravel pit 2 miles out of town and people swam there. They were there about every warm summer night.

They also crossed the railroad bridge or took the boat to get to the big hill across from Nenana. They climbed on the hill. The older boys rebuilt a house boat and got an old car engine that they put that in the boat. It was a nice house boat with cooking utensils and everything.

They raided gardens for potatoes and turnips and in fall time they went duck hunting 6-10 miles down the river to Linder Lake. They had to go up a little slough

to get to the lake and there was a nice cabin to live in. In the morning, noon and night they hunted ducks and sometimes got a bull moose.

26:55 They were mischievous. Once they greased the railroad tracks in a spot where the railroad climbs up a bit as it approaches the bridge and the train stalled when it hit the greased spot. They had to get the section crew to clean the tracks with diesel to get the oil off. The boys never got caught for that, and they continued with their mischief with Alaska Railroad. They had fun but they never destroyed anything.

28:28 They would borrow little flat cars that the section crew used to pull behind speeders, hauling ties or railroad iron. They hated to walk, so once they borrowed a three-wheeler pup speeder to go fishing three miles south from town.

All the kids were involved, the Wright brothers, the Coghills, and the Robinsons. Robinsons left Nenana in early 1940s because their father got transferred from being the power house manager at Mount McKinley National Park in summers, to Anchorage when they closed Nenana power house. Margaret asks if the powerhouse was a part of the NC-Company, but Fred says that in Nenana it wasn't. It belonged to the Alaska Railroad who supplied electricity, steam and power for the railroad buildings but not to the rest of the town.

The town had its own city power plant that was owned by Henry Kaiser. His son is living in Anchorage and he would know a lot about Alaskan History. Alana Dewey, Henry Kaiser Jr.'s sister lives at Chena Ridge. They had a little bit of Native blood in them and they lived next door to Huppriches.

31:07 Margaret asks about employment in Nenana, and Fred tells that it was mostly there in summertime. Alaska Railroad hauled in freight that was loaded into steamers and taken down the river where there was lots of mining. Lots of the freight went through Nenana, up the Iditarod and Koyukuk. That's how they got in fuel by drums and equipment like tractors and draglines.

There was lots of labor for anybody who wanted to work, since lots of wood had to be cut for steamers. Pay for the railroad labor was only \$3-4 dollars a day and upkeep, but Alaska Railroad was the biggest employer in Nenana.

32:42 There was lots of trapping in wintertime and Nenana was a big stopping point for trappers in Kantishna country. When the steamboats stopped, the dog teams started running and people would come to Nenana with 10-15 dogs and two sleds. Trappers would come over Christmas holidays to sell their fur and then return to the trap-line.

Fairbanks was the end of the rail in the early days, and they brought in equipment for mining. [The railroad?] was the backbone of Fairbanks. Airplanes helped trappers get to the bush and pick them up.

33:55 Fred was working for Alaska Airlines before he got drafted, and got to fly many trips. They would deliver [grocery] orders for trappers and the pilots knew where the trap-line cabins were, so Fred dropped mail and groceries out the plane door.

Margaret says they must have packed eggs pretty well, and Fred agrees that they did. The first time they did it, Fred thought he had packed the eggs well, but the trapper asked them to not send eggs since they were always broken. Fred got a brand-new gallon can and cracked eggs all in there, wrapped it in a box and dropped that and the trapper was happy. He divided the eggs up and froze the ones he didn't need.

35:41 Margaret asks about the stores in town, and if Coghills had a store. Fred says he wants to tell more about Nenana itself. When Fred grew up, they had NC-Company chain-store. NC-Company had stores all over Alaska. There were also individual operators like Coghill Store and others, so there were 5 stores in Nenana that all sold groceries, clothes and hardware.

Around 1938-1940, there was a law passed that booze had to be sold separately from the main store. The liquor store could be attached to the main store but it had to have a separate entrance. The stores competed with each other and there weren't that many people in Nenana.

Margaret interjects by asking what the population was at the time. Before Fred's time, during the construction of the railroad, there were probably 6-7,000 people but the population dropped down quite a bit after that.

The railroad had quite a big operation with a hospital and 2-3 dormitories. They built 8-10 houses for their higher-up personnel and those houses had a sewer system. Part of the business district in Nenana had facilities and when Fred was in Nenana, they had running water and a sewer system. They were living right downtown.

Fred's father was a fire and police chief there. It was just a title and a part-time job. Their shop and garage was big enough to hold the fire equipment so they had it in the early days. They didn't have fire trucks at the time but they had a hose cart and a chemical cart that they towed first behind horses and later behind vehicles. There were maybe only 6 fire hydrants in the main part of town. If the fire was out of town, they just went in with the little chemical cart and hoped to put the fire out.

39:20 Margaret asks if they had bad fires during the winter, but Fred says that they didn't have but 2-3 bad fires. They had a block burn down in October of 1935, and the fire took a number of restrooms, Fred's uncle's store, Coghill store, [unclear] store, and other buildings right from the Main Street. Now the Community Center is sitting at the spot.

Margaret asks what caused the fire, and Fred tells he doesn't know. They were all wood buildings that were stacked together. Margaret mentions concrete fire walls, and Fred tells that they never had concrete in Nenana, except for in the basement of the railroad depot. Everything else was wood and they had wooden sidewalks.

Fred tells that he remembers some floods in springtime. They paddled around and kids used sidewalks as rafts. The sidewalks broke up to 10-foot sections and some sidewalks in front of stores were maybe 10 feet wide. Lots of kids had canoes and nobody knew what a life jacket was. The floods were usually breakup floods.

42:02 In the spring when they were about 14 years old, they got a chance to work at their high school, doing typing and sorting tickets for the Nenana Ice Classic. Fred's father was the manager of the Ice Classic and Fred himself says that he

watched the ice break dozens of times. Even now he goes to Nenana to see the river go out if he can. He's won the Ice Pool for a couple of times while he was living in Fairbanks. He was in different pools but didn't win much. Most he ever got was \$392 dollars.

Margaret asks when the Nenana Ice Classic started, and they agree that it was around 1915 or so. Fred tells that it started when they were building the railroad bridge and there was a big construction crew in Nenana.

[End of the tape.]