

**Call number: 94-13-18 PT. 1 SIDE B**

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

**Date: June 7, 1994 recorded at home of interviewee**

**Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen**

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**Series: Pioneer Tapes**

Fred tells a story: The boys were playing in an island across Nenana, and just below the island on the mainland there was a railroad powder shack that was made of sheet iron. They found 40-50 pound kegs of black powder and proceeded to take one of the cans, but they didn't know that the bottom of the can was rusted out and it leaked gunpowder when they carried it a couple of hundred feet away from the main shack. They prepared to blast a tree out, but after the tree blew out a little bit, the boys noticed that the flame continued burning towards the shack through the line of powder they had left. They were far enough from it when the shack blew sheet metal all over the place [so nobody got hurt]. They never got caught, but that scared Fred so that he didn't do many pranks after it.

2:33 Margaret asks if the bottom story of the school was used for social events, and Fred tells that it was. They had wooden floors and it was finished inside with painted beaver board. Beaver board was compressed composition of wood, 4x8 sheets that were ¼ inch thick. It was called hard board.

Margaret asks about town gatherings like Christmas parties. Fred tells that 4<sup>th</sup> of July was the main celebration for people in Nenana. Lots of the communities in early Alaska raised funds for footraces, like bicycle races, and three legged races. Prior to all that, Fred's family made around 50 gallons of ice cream. They had a big ice cream mixer and an access to the ice house. They made all their ice cream out of can milk. They made vanilla, strawberry, and chocolate and put it in 2-gallon coffee cans. NC-Company froze the ice cream for them. They made the ice cream a couple of weeks previous, and made home-made root beer, popcorn balls and other concessions. They set the concession in front of their building and their

mother sold the products for nickels. The boys would be running races with the rest of the boys and participating in festivities. Men had tug'o'wars for beer.

6:41 Pioneer Lodge [of Pioneers of Alaska] put on card parties and there was a women's knit group who played cards from 7 pm to 9 pm, after which they had a meal and a dance. Card parties happened mostly during the winter. Fred doesn't remember too much about how the whole town celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Margaret asks if they had a movie theater, and Fred tells that they did, and explains that that goes back to Jack Coghill. Prior to him, there were movies but Fred doesn't remember who run them. Jack took over when he was a teenager. He got projectors, and a man to run the projector. That was mostly on weekends. Fred's family owned the building where the theater was. It was a nice place before Fred's time but went downhill after the bridge construction was over. Then Jack took over it and ran the movie theater for quite some time until Fred's father tore the building down and Jack's theater moved to Pioneer Lodge which is still standing, although the roof is caved in and it's to be torn down. It's on the Main Street; railroad depot would be on the right side.

9:24 Margaret asks if Fred ever rode on the riverboat Nenana. He says that they watched the building of the steamer Nenana that took maybe a year. It was launched in 1934. He remembers sitting on a railroad bridge, waiting for the boat to be launched. The boat slid into the river and caused almost a tidal wave when it hit the water, splashing water "high as the ceiling here" and across the river while everyone was taking pictures.

Few days later, after they got the steam going and the wheels turning, they took all of the town of Nenana for an excursion trip. They left from the dock and went down river and about ½ way down some problem arose with machinery. They had a nice dinner with fresh fish and vegetables, 2-3 types of meat and many other drinks. The kids were running around. They got the boat repaired and had been on water for about 8 hours. Fred isn't sure what month it was, but it was early in the summer.

12:44 Margaret asks if Captain Adams was the initial pilot and Fred says that he was. Margaret says that Captain Charles Adams dropped Barnett off in Fairbanks and his nephew was the last captain. Fred says that they had quite a few captains

on steamers, and mentions the boats Berry K. and the steamer Alice. There were many others too.

The first trip of the Nenana was free for the town of Nenana because they wanted to show appreciation towards people. The food was cooked by the railroad employees. After that, the steamboat went straight to work, pushing barges up and down the river.

One late fall they took the Nenana to Whitehorse and the government paid to have work done on it, and they put in a whole new plank tall on it [?]. They launched it in the spring and took it back to Nenana. Then it sat in Nenana for a while without doing much until the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and other people brought it into Fairbanks to be a tourist attraction. They made a slip on the Chena River, close to where the power plant is now, and it was floating in water pond until the river dropped. It sat there a number of years until the Alaska Centennial happened and it was moved to Alaskaland [now known as Pioneer Park].

15:35 Wigger [sp?] and Fred got the job of moving it down to Alaskaland, which was half a mile down river. They floated it down using tractors as anchors since the boat didn't have any power and it just drifted. The slip in Alaskaland has been moved from the place where they first put it. Fred thinks he was the last person to steer the wheel while the boat was on water.

The historical society got funds to put the Nenana in shape in which it is now, and Fred thinks it's marvelous. Then it was moved a bit and now it's sitting on concrete foundation and looking wonderful. It's quite an attraction.

17:00 Margaret asks if Fred spent his first 16 years in Nenana before he moved to Fairbanks. He tells that in 1943 they were more or less out of the transfer business because there was not many people left in Nenana and nobody needed ice anymore. Fuel oil was in the scene and there wasn't much wood cutting to be done so the brothers disbanded Alaska Transfer.

That summer Fred went to work for the Civil Aeronautics Authority and was working at Summit for Alaska Railroad Company. He was 16 years old and driving Cats and trucks. That fall he left to go to school in Nenana but when he got there, he found that his mother and sisters had moved to Fairbanks so he decided to

go to school there too. He was a couple of years behind everybody because he had been losing school in Nenana. [Break in the recording.]

18:21 When Frank was going to school in Fairbanks, he was far behind other kids and his mother and the family were having a hard time and so Frank got a job hauling wood for a couple of woodcutters, and doing other odd jobs until spring. In spring he worked in other trucking jobs for several people.

Margaret asks whom he worked for and Fred tells that there was an old woodcutter by the name of Pete Smith. He sold wood for customers in town. The other person was Quintal Pollini who had a wood yard right in Fairbanks where they stored wood. Later that year, Fred got a job with Alaska Road Commission. They were putting a lift on the Moose Creek Dike that was built to protect the City of Fairbanks so that the Piledriver Slough wouldn't flood every spring. Fred worked there during the winter of 1943. He drove truck and ran equipment over there when he was just 16 years old. The road commission overlooked his age.

He stopped with that job a couple in spring and laid around for a couple of months until he started hauling cement from Fairbanks to Whitehorse for the government. He never got the chance of going back to school.

21:14 Margaret says that at the time he was working for the road commission, there was the war going on, and asks if there was a shortage of men. Fred says that that was the reason that the kids got jobs a bit easier.

When the school was out in spring during years 1943-1946, school kids headed to Alaska Road Commission because they were sure they would get jobs driving trucks since they had lots of roads to repair. In early days they called the Alaska Road Commission "a school for the young and home for the old" because they had the young school kids driving trucks and the old men doing blasting and the better jobs. That's what old-timers who were too old to get drafted, did.

There was lots of government work around since they were building Ladd Field and Eielson Air Force Base at the time. Frank worked for Alaska Freight Lines at Eielson one year, hauling black top to pave the runway. He worked for them one winter, hauling tailing piles gravel to Ladd Field. Ladd Field was using that for a base for a lot of buildings.

23:15 One month Frank hauled some barrels of asphalt to different locations along the way to Valdez. The government was building emergency runways in Gulkana, Big Delta, Tanacross and places like that. Margaret mentions the land lease planes.

Frank tells that he would sit at the end of the runway and watch the planes land. Americans brought planes in and Russians flew them out. The planes didn't stay on the ground for long. Many ferry pilots were women.

25:06 Margaret asks about shortages in town. Frank tells that they rationed sugar and tires. Women couldn't find a silk sock in the whole territory since silk was used for something like parachutes. Margaret says that she heard that Russians bought lots of luxury items. Fred tells that his mother was a clerk at the NC-Store and the Russians would come in and buy cigarettes and candy and load every plane that left Fairbanks with goodies that they took to their sweethearts. Another big item that they wanted was cosmetics like lipsticks. Fred's mother said they'd buy a whole store out of nice things.

Fred remembers the "good old days" when they bought cigarettes for 50 cents a carton, which was a good deal. It was 10 packs to a cart. Those days they didn't have many robberies in Fairbanks even with all the GIs around.

27:12 Margaret says that trouble makers would get "a blue ticket." Fred tells that that was before the army when the marshal would get somebody the blue ticket. The MP's [Military Police] would walk with their own police force in town and there was collaboration with the military and the town and that's why nobody got into too much trouble.

Margaret asks about Fred's trip to Whitehorse on Alaska Highway. He tells he did a couple of trips there and. [Break in the recording.] It was a rough road at the time, but Fred was hauling freight there in summer of 1944. He had George Nehrbus truck and he remembers that it took 10 days to complete the trip since it was gravel roads and they had lots of flat tires. He carried about 5-6 tons on a back of a 1.5 ton truck.

29:00 On one trip, Fred stayed at barracks after loading up his truck. It cost 2 bits for bed and 2 for meal. Fred stopped in town of Whitehorse and wanted to have a good breakfast before he left, so he ate at a restaurant where he paid with \$20

dollar bill, receiving \$20 Canadian dollars back. He was puzzled because he forgot about the exchange rate.

He had washouts on the road and had to wait for a few hours sometimes. He was lucky to meet another driver and they became buddies. The other driver was more experienced and showed Fred lots of the things to do to get home safely.

31:00 After that, Fred worked different jobs for a variety of companies. In later years, when the war was over, he got a job from Mitchell Truck and Tractor Service. He worked for Bobby Mitchell, and Clyde Geraghty who were partners. "Bobby was something like the Alaska Road Commission." He gave a chance to all the young kids in town who wanted to learn something. He was like a father to them. Clyde was a mechanic and Bob was the one who told people what to do and when, and told them how to skin Cat [operate a Caterpillar bulldozer] the right way and how to drive truck. They worked quite a bit in town with dump trucks, hauling gravel, and with tractors.

Bob also had a contract to haul freight from Valdez to groceries in Fairbanks, like the old Market Basket, Lavery's grocery and also for construction outfits.

2:28 Fred was still working in 1949 when they got the contract to haul all the steel from Northward Building. They did that from 1949 to 1951 and all the steel came from Valdez and it was hauled by truck. Reed and Martin had the contract for building the Northward Building. They made a trip to Valdez every three days: it took them one day to drive there, one day to drive back, and one day on each side to work on the truck and get some sleep. At that time they only freighted in summer since the Valdez Trail was closed in winter because of Isabel Pass and Thompson Pass.

33:49 Margaret asks what shape the road was in in summertime, and Fred tells that it was all gravel, but that at the time, a crew was rebuilding the road from Fairbanks downward. Sections of the road had different contractors. They were driving mostly on gravel and they had lots of flat tires. On one trip, Fred had 13 flat tires. They carried all the tools to repair tires.

Margaret wonders if they carried their own fuel too, and Fred tells that they had enough gas in the fuel tanks to go each way, so they only fueled in Fairbanks and

in Valdez. They had other mechanical problems too [Fred lists a few]. Those days they were pulling trailers instead of hauling right in the back of the truck. They had semis.

If one met a truck from the same outfit on the road, they'd help pull a dead truck from underneath the trailer and the other truck would finish the trip. They would either fix the truck on the way or tow it to Fairbanks.

35:49 There were a number of places to stop, old roadhouses, like Tiekell Roadhouse, Tontsina Roadhouse, Copper Center Roadhouse, Junction Inn, Sourdough Roadhouse, Meyer's Roadhouse, Paxon Roadhouse, Rapids Roadhouse, and Silver Fox Lodge. There were also places to stop where one could get sandwiches. Everything was 50 miles apart. Lots of roadhouses were closed down and falling apart.

Margaret asks about Rika's Roadhouse, and Fred tells that it was still operating. That there used to be a ferry across the Tanana River before there was a bridge, which was built probably a year prior to Fred starting to drive the Richardson Highway. He doesn't remember ever taking the ferry, and suggests that Margaret should talk with Gene Rogi. Gene came into the country around 1928 and was in the trucking business all his life.

Fred never worked for him but they worked together. They had breakfasts and dinners in roadhouses. Gene had his own business and he drove his own trucks so they'd meet at a roadhouse. Margaret suggests that all of the truckers knew each other and Fred confirms that they did. Fred continues that when the roads were open year-round, there was lots of work in winterizing trucks and keeping tire chains in good shape. Some days it was -35 to 40 below and so cold that one would get good traction but if there were 2-3 inches of fresh snow, one better put chains on.

39:38 Margaret asks if year-round trucking industry started only in 1950s. Fred tells that he drove for Alaska Freight Lines in 1948 to 1949, hauling mail from Seattle. A lot of the freight came to Dawson Creek in British Columbia where the train went. Alaska Freight Lines was mostly hauling for the military at Fort Richardson, Ladd Field and Eielson, and then to Big Delta. They had two people in

the truck, and they had a sleeper cab where the other driver could sleep while the other drove. They were driving 24 hours a day. Fred did that for whole winter.

He jumped between Mitchell Truck and Tractor, AFL.

[End of the recording.]