

**Call number: 94-13-19 SIDE A**

**Name and place: Harvey Marlin interviewed by Margaret van Cleave.**

**Date: June 14, 1994 recorded at home of interviewee**

**Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen**

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**Series: Pioneer Tapes**

Margaret van Cleave introduces the recording with Harvey Marlin who is a lifelong Alaskan and a founding partner of Gem Construction Company.

Margaret asks Harvey to talk a bit about his family history in the North. Harvey tells that his grandfather, who was a blacksmith in Seattle, operated across the Four Seasons that was the Premier Hotel at the time. In 1897 or 1898, he sold his shop and took off to Alaska with a partner with whom he built a boat that they tried to sail to Skagway. First time they failed but on the second attempt they made it to Skagway, from where they went to Klondike over the Chilkoot Pass and started mining.

2:30 They sunk a shaft and it seemed like a good prospect so they returned to Seattle and got more equipment that they took up with a steamer. They started working again but it turned out that they had landed a hot spot and there wasn't much gold that after that.

They stayed in Klondike anyway and invited Harvey's mother with her younger sister to spend a summer there in 1903. The two girls did that, after which they returned to Seattle. Harvey's grandfather didn't strike it rich but he stayed there for a long time. They moved to Fairbanks around 1910. Harvey tells that his grandfather didn't talk much about how he came into the country.

4:21 He was originally from Germany. He was in the German army in the medical corps. Once he was attending to a young, wounded fellow and was told by a senior officer to not spend much time with that fellow since there were plenty of other wounded soldiers. He left to America and did blacksmithing work.

Thawing frozen ground was done by steam at the time, but he built the first cold water thaw, which looks like a chisel with two water-jet openings on each side of the chisel that shot water. Nowadays most all thawing is done by water. Harvey's grandfather, August Wenzel, didn't patent it but he just wanted something that works.

Harvey talks about his and his wife's trip to Germany.

6:55 Margaret asks what August did in Fairbanks. Harvey tells that he moved to Fairbanks around 1910 and he moved to midway between Fairbanks and Nenana, wanting to become a fox farmer. He was a fox farmer for a number of years. When the river was free of ice, he'd come to Fairbanks to do blacksmithing work for Jimmy Barrack [sp?] in Sammon's Hardware building. He did that for some summer months and returned to his fox farm.

Harvey's uncle from mother's side, Steve, came up around 1913 and also came down to the fox farm and the two of them operated the fox farm for a number of years. The farm was operational until "we" came up.

8:43 Harvey's father came up in 1926 since USA wasn't very prosperous at the time. Harvey's uncle had written to him and invited him to come to Alaska, telling about trapping that people did in winter, catching salmon in summer, and he also told about foxes.

Harvey's uncle was good at building wooden devices and his grandfather did the metal work.

Margaret asks what the farm was like and how many animals they had, but Harvey says he doesn't remember the total number of foxes. The corrals were rather large, about 12x20 in size so the foxes could move around. They had just a pair of foxes in one cage. They were built up high and they were on the ground. When they added mink, the mink cages were much smaller, probably 2x3-4 feet. They were very confined.

11:00 Harvey's Uncle Steve came in around 1930 with a horse. The boat that he took to Alaska docked in Valdez and Uncle Steve came up with his horse who became his companion.

When Harvey and his family got to the farm, the horse had died but Uncle Steve told stories about the horse: There was a lake where they lived and in fall they went duck hunting. The horse followed Uncle Steve but as soon as it heard a shot, he charged in the middle of the lake and if there were any birds left he scared them off.

Uncle Steve was instrumental for the fox farm and he was called Fox Kid at the time when everyone was called a kid.

12:38 The farm was located at a place that was known for most of the folks who traveled the river as Monument Point. Margaret asks if it was on the mainland or in an island and Harvey tells it was on mainland. Across from Monument Point there lived a gentleman who raised pigs in a place called Whiskey Island. Harvey doesn't know where the name was from. The man fell from his boat and cried for help. He drowned just when Uncle Steve got his boat to the river to help him. He sank from the weight of silt.

15:07 Margaret asks if Harvey had to take care of the animals at the fox farm. Harvey tells that they dealt with food that was primarily fish. As soon as the ice was gone on the river, they started preparing for fishing.

As a family unit, they didn't go to Fairbanks much. They left Seattle in 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 1929, and arrived in Fairbanks June 10<sup>th</sup>. They spent one night at Northern Hotel and headed down river by a poling boat.

Every one of them, the two girls and two boys, had chores. Their eldest was 12 years old. Margaret asks if they used fish wheels, and Harvey tells that they had 5 of them. They fished all they could and baled the fish which they sold to the Northern Commercial Company. George Block had the riverboat service. He had a powerboat to which they piled all the fish and took it to NC-Company who sold it for dog food.

17:41 Harvey's family froze the fish they were going to use for dog feed and during summer months the fish would be given to the animals raw. Foxes had a little bit different mix of food.

At that time caribou wandered through all the time and if they got a caribou or a moose in wintertime, they had meat.

The bears were a problem since they would tear fish off the racks and eat some, and then gather more bears to eat the fish too. They sometimes had to shoot bears that were either black or cinnamon colored bears. They ate the bears and gave some to their creatures.

19:42 Margaret asks if bears ever bothered humans and Harvey tells that they never did. They always had dogs that were a good alarm system. Dogs have a good sense of smell and if there was a bear in the area they'd become very quiet and they would point. They were sled dogs.

Margaret asks about the time when they harvested their foxes. Harvey tells that he doesn't remember the dates, but it was in the dead of the winter. They didn't have the best luck since fur became almost worthless in 1929 to 1931. During the depression, the market wasn't there and raising foxes and mink wasn't the wisest thing to be doing at the time, which was also when Harvey's family came into the country.

Margaret asks if there was a lot of competition from Canadian sources and Harvey tells that it was likely, but the main issue was that the market just wasn't there and the world price was down.

21:53 Margaret asks how they sold the furs, and Harvey tells that they sold them to fur buyers who visited the ranch. If they had to bring the fur into town, they'd take a riverboat in the summer and dog team in the winter. It was a 40-mile trip to town but they weren't isolated at all.

They were home schooled for their first year and their mother taught the home school program. Then they acquired a small house on lower 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue where they wintered while the kids went to school. As soon as the ice went out on the river, they moved back to the ranch for summer.

There was just the one main school on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Margaret says it was the school that burnt in 1932. Harvey tells that it was memorable and that the children felt terrible after the fire, but it was exciting while it was burning. Harvey doesn't remember the exact time of the fire, but recalls that it was late at night since they were at home. He guesses it was at 9 or 10 pm. He stayed at the site until the building was gone and everybody had left. Everyone attended a fire and they were

all fire supporters. Margaret says that people were curious but also concerned, and Harvey chimes in by saying that they definitely helped too if they could.

24:45 Margaret asks if the fire station was in the general vicinity, and Harvey tells that it was reasonably close. The fire station was where the downtown post office is now, between the post office and Woolworth Store at 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Turner Street.

When there was a fire, the NC-Company [Northern Commercial Company] would blow their whistle so that everybody knew that there was a major fire. Margaret asks if the whistle had different rings according to where the fire was in town, but Harvey says he doesn't recall. It made enough noise to alert everybody and if one wanted to know where the fire was, they could call the telephone switch operator. Harvey and Margaret agree that sometimes the operators knew too much about everybody.

26:17 Harvey tells that they didn't have too many days off from school due to the school fire but there were some since all of the supplies had to be replenished. They had their classes in the Moose Hall, the Eagle's Hall, at the Elks Hall and in the Masonic Temple. The halls were quite spacious and had large dance halls.

They had tables and chair that were maybe shipped from some storage area. Harvey says that he doesn't think it took a long time before they got all the necessities for going to school.

27:42 Margaret asks about the old bush pilots. Harvey tells that they knew the pilots fairly well. When he got out of high school, in 1937 he worked at a restaurant directly across the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue where the coop building is now. The place was called Jerry and Jill's Café. Harvey washed dishes and had wonderful time learning about restaurants and dirty dishes.

Earl Heath [sp?] and him worked at the same place and they got a word that a mining company over at 40-mile was hiring wood cutters so they bought an ax and a swede-saw but didn't have money left for travel. They went to see a local pilot, Frank Pollock, and they asked if he'd fly them over to 40-Mile to see if they can get a job and pay him back later. He agreed and dropped them off at Jack Wade Creek.

The people at Jack Wade told the boys to go to Chicken where there was a dredge operating so they flew to Chicken in late afternoon. They walked over to the dredge that was on the other side of the river. It wasn't operating in the evening and they asked for the boss in order to see if they'd be hired. The boss was at Walkers Fork, but the crew welcomed Harvey and Earl Heath to stay and eat with them. Harry Cowden, the boss, came in and told that he doesn't need woodcutters but point drivers. Harvey and Earl told him that the work was right up their alley.

The following morning they went to Walkers Fork. Their boss had their bags in the horse buggy while the boys had to walk 11 hours and 20 minutes. They got to sleep in a barn and the next day they started working at the lower camp dredge where they worked for the summer.

Frank Pollock was willing to help, but didn't get paid in the end since in the fall, Cowden told Harvey and Earl that they wouldn't get paid since he hadn't had a good year, but they had had a room and board for the summer.

33:58 Margaret asks if there was an airstrip in the 40-mile but Harvey tells there were gravel air strips in Jack Wade and in Chicken, which were the only ones before Dawson. They got mail very seldom and it was carried by dogs with saddle packs.

Margaret asks if Harvey got any mail from Fairbanks during that summer. He tells that he didn't until late in the fall when a man who delivered mail from Chicken Creek to Walker's Fork with a couple of dogs walked over. They knew he had arrived because he'd stock up on Silver Dollar Whiskey and he whispered to potential buyers that they had a present underneath the pillow. They didn't want the mail as much as they wanted whisky. Late in the fall Frank Pollock flew over and threw the mail from his airplane. The mail was scattered on the hillside and there were some letters. Lots of the mail was never found. 2-3 weeks later Harvey found a book *Gone with the Wind* and it felt like he had found gold.

37:18 Margaret asks if most of the supplies were brought in early in the season. Harvey tells that they came from Dawson where there was an NC-Company store. There was also a road from Dawson to the Walkers Fork.

That was the first and last summer Harvey did that kind of work since they didn't get paid. Harvey had wanted to use the money to go to University, but it didn't materialize. The man told that he had intended to pay everybody but he didn't make any money. He was a liar but the workers were at his mercy. Julian Hurley filed a lawsuit against the mining operation and the NC-Company bought off a percentage and settled their debt with the owner. They got paid 50 cents on the dollar by the NC-Company later that year, while the owner of the company paid nothing. Harvey didn't get to go to school.

39:45 Margaret asks if Harvey was still in Fairbanks when war was declared. He says he stayed in Fairbanks until war was declared and went outside later. He went briefly to the University of Washington and came back to Alaska to work for the FE-Company that was working at the Cleary Dredge. Even before Harvey started working there, they were building the Pedro Dredge at the mouth of Pedro Creek where Harvey helped to build the dredge before starting at Cleary Dredge. That was just before the outbreak of the war. From there he went to Cripple Creek where they were building the No. 10 Dredge and Harvey worked on the final construction of that dredge and later he worked on the dredge until WW-2.

41: 16 Margaret asks if Harvey remembers the moment he heard of the outbreak of the war but he says he doesn't. They had a couple of fellows working on the dredge system, Bert Walker and Earl Beistline, Dick Marin, and Johnny Ailworth. They also had a National Guard organized and they all joined. Margaret asks if they all worked on the dredge together and Harvey explains that Earl worked at mining through the University [University of Alaska Fairbanks] where he was going to school, but they were all associated with the FE-Company. They joined the National Guard in 1940.

Their National Guard was functioning like a training unit where they did gymnastics. When they were federalized, incorporated to the regular army, they were sent to Fort Richardson where they became a training battalion who trained all the draftees and made them qualified for other assignments.

43:46 Margaret asks if the men from Alaska were assigned anywhere and not just up North. Harvey says they were sent anywhere where they were needed at the time. Prior to going down [to Fort Richardson?], Charlie Weiner who was a life-

long friend of Harvey's, told that his girlfriend's sister was coming to Fairbanks and he wanted Harvey to get her from the train station.

[End of the recording.]