

H97-175-14

Harrie Hughes

May 6-11, 1960

Pioneers of Alaska Igloo no. 4 Park and Monument Project

Harrie Hughes, chairman of the park and monument committee introduces the tape. He talks about the work he has been doing for the creation of the historic park which will be located at Peger and Airport Roads in Fairbanks. He visited the city engineers office, fourth district recorder, school tax office, Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Public Roads Engineering Office. He turned all the information over to Douglas Culp. There will be a request for the plot of land needed for the park. Earl Pilgrim made a map and typed a set of applications. Harrie took all of the papers to Paul Griemann. He then took all of the papers to Warren Taylor to help speed up the process. The pioneers want the park to be at the state level and not at the local level.

May 26, 1960

Meeting of the Tanana Yukon Historical Society

University of Alaska Fairbanks

Harrie Hughes has all of the participants introduce themselves: George Smith, Alma Matlock, Robert Sheldon, Bruce Kelly, Jim Couch, Gilbert Thompson, Yannie Jansen, Chuck Time, Ted Loftus, Andy Wicken, Florence Manville, and Audrey Loftus. Bob Sheldon said he was born in Washington and came to Alaska in 1897 with his father. They had were headed for the gold stampede. He arrived in Skagway on January 2nd on the old steamer, Queen. He will be talking about the history of the automobile in Alaska. He has had an active part since the beginning. When he was in Skagway he worked on building roads and the Whitepass Railroad. His father had a heart attack and wasn't able to work. Bob started selling Seattle PIs. The papers were sold for twenty-five cents. He could get fifty cents or a dollar. Eventually he got into the steamboat business. There were just a few gas boats. In 1903 he started working at the power plant at Skagway. The power plant ran by water for nine months and steam for three months when the water was frozen up. During that time he built a little automobile. There was a girl he wanted to impress. He took an old buggy and attached a gas engine which had originally been in a boat. The engine had been drowned in saltwater and he dried it out and fixed it. He didn't marry the girl he was trying to impress after all. His automobile created a lot of excitement in Skagway.

In 1908 he moved to Fairbanks and worked as the engineer for the NC power plant. He worked there for five years. He shipped the first model-T touring car into Alaska. That was in 1913. That was also the first year an airplane came to Fairbanks. He paid \$1286 by the time it came off the boat in Fairbanks. It cost 368 in Detroit.

He had two weeks vacation from the power plant. Engineers worked ten hours a day and Sundays and holidays. He took the two weeks and used his model-T to run people in and out of town. People started paying him for hauling them around. He made \$1500 for the two weeks he was on vacation. He decided there was money in the automobile business. He quit his engineering job and went into the car business. He said it took about thirty days to get to Seattle by going down the Tanana and the Yukon Rivers. Bob decided there was a quicker way. He traveled over the Valdez road. He had to ford many streams that didn't have bridges. He tried to cross those streams in the morning before the glacial melt increased the flow. He left on the 29th of July (June) and arrived in Valdez on July 2 with a side trip to Chitina. He was traveling when it was dry. He drove down in September when it was raining and it took him a week to get to Valdez. Little by little they improved the road. He ran a service from 1913 and on. In 1921 he and Mr. Gayland organized the Richardson Highway Transportation Company. In 1925 they sold out the business. He took the concessions at McKinley National Park. He operated there until 1940. The government would renew his permit but they wanted him to build a hotel at Wonder Lake and take over the management of the McKinley Hotel. In 1941 the tourist business went down because of the war. He hopes for a road to Barrow and Nome to open up those areas to visitors. He believes the automobile will bring people up to Alaska to see the country.