

Call number: 02-00-104

Charles Jones, interviewed by Audrey Loftus

Place: Probably in Nome

Summary created by Varpu Lotvonen

Date of summary's creation 10/14/13

Notes: Original on 3-inch reel, master copy on CD

The tape starts by Charles Jones talking about a couple of waterfront men who came up to Pelly River. They sent for a lawyer who had been an attorney for a man named the Wild Goose. They took a lawyer out in a bad weather and got \$200 dollars. The interviewer [later, in 02-00-105 identified as Audrey Loftus] asks if he was the lawyer who later defended Al Capone, but Charles says he wasn't. Al Capone's lawyer was Albert Stake [sp?] who was clever but whom Charles never trusted. He was an attorney for the Pioneer. Charles Johnson might have been an attorney for the Pioneer and he was a very fine man. They got the lawyer out and the next year the Circle Court sent a marshal "here" and arrested him [Noyes, as indicated later] and Dudley DeBous [sp?]. Both got a year in jail and he lost his job. Charles doesn't know if McKenzie got caught.

They were all out there making money. When the farmers put up a dance, the manager of the store paid \$100 dollars [?] They had anywhere from 2-3 bar workers there. There were three dance halls and 10-25 dance hall girls. There were gambling games all over. Interviewer says Charles was a young fellow then and asks about gambling. Charles explains that the smallest bet was 2 bits if the game was running but if one wanted to start a game, one would have to buy \$5 dollars' worth of chips. Charles was going to church one night and a fellow had given him \$5 dollars to gamble with. He had two bits left and after the church he got himself \$100 dollars. He won \$42 dollars, and later he won \$210 dollars. He tells more about his successful gambling experiences. Whatever they won was quickly spent.

At 05:09 Charles says he had no home those days and it took 3 years before he got a real home. He stayed in a tent and later he bought himself a little cabin. Out in the hills he lived in a tent over which he stacked snow. They had a stove there and the tent was as warm as anything. The natives used to burn just chips of wood that were cooked in seal oil but when they got those stoves they could bake

[food] in them and cook on top. One of the first traders in Kotzebue told Charles that he got a chance to buy lots of tents from a bankruptcy sale. The natives bought them for \$25-35 dollars apiece. Their houses that were dug down into the sand would all get damp in the summer and the people would move out and stretch a walrus hide on sticks to break the wind and live behind that. When those tents, which were called "calico houses" came, "that was something out of this world. They all got those." Charles didn't have a problem living in a tent during the winter if it was insulated with snow and had a stove. He used to use the slimy stuff from the bottom of his lamp to burn with kindlings to start a fire. Out in the hills he had wood that he picked up, or dry roses and willows.

Charles had a sourdough that he kept going for 12 years and he has one going now too. He doesn't eat so much anymore, but when he was younger he'd eat 5-6 sourdough hotcakes but now 2 is too much with bacon and eggs. At that time [in Nome] they had eggs and dried potatoes.

The interviewer tells that there are many people who have since become famous, like Tex Rickard and Jimmy [James Harold] Doolittle, and asks if Charles can tell anything interesting about them. Tex Rickard was a likable fellow who was in gambling business in the Northern [Probably a business, perhaps a saloon or possibly a hotel] with a partner, Billy Trainor. George Murphy just rented out his [unclear]. Tex was a natural born gambler. Charles knew him well and he knew all the dealers. Talking about gambling and famous gamblers, as well as about a gambling game "Fair bank" [maybe Faro?].

At 11:22 the interviewer asks about somebody [name unclear]. Charles tells that he was in Dawson. At that time they didn't have money. Everything was in gold dust. They weighed the gold on scales and always dropped some. The man in question got the job of sweeping up the floor and he got his start panning out that dust. They made jewelry with gold and every so often [unclear].

Charles has a theory on how placer gold comes. When he worked at Iron Creek, on a good rich claim, the gold was as black as the interviewer's hat. All the geologists and mineralogists he has talked to say that the Imruk Lake was a crater of a big volcano from where all that lava that spattered around country came from. That may have happened in wintertime and gases blew the top off. Gold and silver and other minerals were gaseous and solidified later, and that's why it was all black. Charles found black gold but never any nuggets. Largest nugget from Nome was found around the Discovery.

At 13:44 the interviewer says Charles was in Nome during the Alaska Commercial Company days. Charles says that the Individual [unclear] all the companies. Their manager and all the clerks got a salary. The manager didn't have much to say to how many clerks he got. Individual started in and [unclear]. That's why the companies couldn't compete with them. Lots of clerks were crooked and if you paid them they wouldn't put it in the books at all. It was \$120 to \$130 million dollars that was taken off of the Peninsula and of all the men that had taken the gold, from \$20's to a million, not a one of them has left anything as a token of appreciation. Charles says that Alaska has been good to him and that the more money he spent, the more he got.

The interviewer talks about how she values Charles. [End of the recording.]