

Call number: 02-00-105

Charles Jones, interviewed by Audrey Loftus

Place: In Nome, [Recording case was dated July 10th, 1960.]

Summary created by Varpu Lotvonen

Date of summary's creation 10/14/13

Notes: Original on 7-inch reel, master copy on CD

The interviewer's [later identified as Audrey Loftus] voice says it's July 10th, 1960 and they are recording the third side of the tape. Charlie was born in 1875 and he came to Alaska in 1900. Interviewer asks Charlie to talk about some of the disasters in Nome -area. Charlie talks about a storm that was all along the Snake River went out to the [Nome] beach. It didn't do any damage in the main part of the town, but it cleaned the waterfront. That was in 1901. Then in 1904 there was a big fire. It was said that one of the dance hall girls threw a lamp in the Gambia dance hall and it burned down the center of the town. Finally, they got it stopped, saving a lot of the town. In 1913, they had a big storm that cleaned the seaside and the east side of town. All the houses all along the seaside were washed out. That was a bad storm, which started in Saturday afternoon and on Sunday night when Charles had escorted [unclear's] wife and daughters to the Episcopal Church and watched how it was washing in on the [unclear] Avenue. Charles didn't think anything of it and went to bed when he got home. When he woke up in the morning, Mrs. Bachelor from the Miners and Merchants Bank knocked on the door wondering if she could come in. Her feet were all wet because he had had to wade their way from the bank. They were afraid of what was going to happen because the storm was so strong. The lifesaver's station was washed away.

The really big fire was in 1934 and that swept through the center of the town. That fire originated from the old Golden Gate Hotel. A fellow had run it as a lodging house and there was a still running at the 3rd floor. A fellow called Rushing Tom was watching the still but he went away for a few moments during which the still blew up. There was a 60-mile gale from the north east and the fire just swept over the town. The entire seaside was destroyed. The fire was stopped at Johnny Keshak's [sp?] house. Charles' house disappeared as smoke over Siberia. That was in 1913. The interviewer asks if he had time to get anything out of the house and Charles tells that he got practically all his furniture out but not his stove because

somebody had stolen his wrenches and the stove couldn't be uncoupled from the water boiler. They got him out of the house while he was trying to drag it out.

5:53 Then there were two fires in the new buildings. [Unclear] Harper had built a hotel on his garage and his wife ran that. That got into fire. After that, Babe Sidenberg [sp? Seidenberg?] had built a beautiful store "down there". He and his wife went out after putting their 4 children to bed. The place caught fire and only the older daughter was saved.

But the 1934 fire was the worst and it burned the Courthouse, the Masonic temple, Eagle Hall, Moose Hall, newspaper offices, and all the grocery stores. There were warehouses that didn't burn. It burned the city hall and all the records from the start of Nome. They had a copy of the original incorporation papers and ordinances, but all the other things had to be redone.

When one has exhausted a placer mine [unclear.] Many of the creeks were mined out by hand. The Present Beach was worked by hand but because of the methods, half of the gold was always lost. The storm concentrated gold into places from which one could take out a little money. Then the war came along and lots of the men went out. Then when [unclear] they brought the [Spanish Influenza] flu to Nome. 110 Natives died in one wave. Charles was working at a dock [unclear about his brother] and when they got off the boat they just died right there in Seattle. They had the old courthouse up there on the hill, on the Esler Way. They made it into a hospital and put the people there.

The serum run was later. The people were suffering from diphtheria. They ran out of serum in no time and sent the word outside by a relay of dog teams who ran night and day. They got serum from Seward. The interviewer asks how long it took to get the serum and Charles says it felt awfully long because he had three children. He was careful with them and doctor advised them with how to feed the children and what to look out for so their children didn't get it. Folks all around got it but when they got the serum, they cured pretty fast. Several of them died. That was a big trouble.

The flu was rampant as well and every day in Seattle one could see funeral processions going on and everyone was walking with [unclear] over their faces to keep from inhaling the germs. After the men were gone, the town shrunk pretty fast. Many of them died and many just didn't come back. Their families went Outside.

At 11:32 Charles tells about his marriage: he got married in Nome to a young woman around 1922. Charles asks the interviewer to check the date. The interviewer says that Charles has a record almost for everything one would want to know. He [their child, Daniel Amasa Jones] was born in 1924 and Charles was married in 1922 in October. The Interviewer asks if [Unclear] was a family name and Charles explains that in early days people tried to give biblical names to children and Amasa was one of them. Daniel is a common name among the Inuits of the Arctic and that's where Charles' ancestors got the name [unclear].

His wife, Loretta Mary San, was a widow with two children. Charles adopted the two girls and afterwards, they got a son. Charles has raised the girls as his own children, and they were so small that they don't remember their father. More talking about his large family. They had to buy lots of children's clothes because the children grew up so fast. The older girl's name was Juanita and the other girl was Jane. Juanita called herself Anita and she passed away recently. She wanted her children to become musicians, which they are. Her daughter is on her third year at Juilliard School of Music. She is learning teaching violin and has only one year left. Anita wanted to get a home all paid for. She would have had money to pay the loan back many times, but the bank didn't let her do that. More talking about Anita.

Jane has one daughter and she married Larry Galvin who is a merchant in Nome and was running the oil delivery until him and his sister Agnus bought the hardware store, U.S Mercantile Company. He [the original owner] ran coasters up and down the coast. When he died, the widow sold it and he [Larry Galvin] bought it. When the big storm came [unclear] across the street, they moved to this side of the street and sold those lots to people. The interviewer asks if Jane lives in California, but Charles says she lives in Squamish, Washington.

Larry sold out to a fellow named Hungerfer [Hungerford?]. He bought the big shore property at Squamish. To get there, one has to cross with a ferry or drive to Tacoma to take the suspension bridge. More talking about Squamish. Dan graduated as a mining engineer from the University [of Alaska Fairbanks] and was appointed as an assistant engineer to an outfit in Nome. He had a chance to open a quartz mine and took the opportunity since he only knew the theory of quartz mines but he didn't have experience. He wrote to Charles that [unclear]. [End of the recording.]

At 20:26 Audrey Loftus says that she is interviewing Charles Jones in his home in Nome and asks Mr. Jones to go on with his story. Charles is talking about his son Daniel: Charles had written to Dan, saying that if he does his work absolutely, he knows it's the best that could be and other people will recognize it as such. A month or so after Dan wrote back, thanking for the advice. Bill [his supervisor?] called Dan and said he didn't have much use for a young mining engineer looking down his nose at him because he came up the hard way but that he appreciates Dan's work. Dan became Bill's assistant so that he can take over the operation when Bill is gone. Now Dan has a job from Bureau of Land Management that was looking for an engineer who could take over the engineering department. They wanted a person with placer and hard rock experience. He got the job out of 60 applicants. More talking about Dan's career and moving to Washington [State?]. Charles met him in Fairbanks last winter during the Ice Carnival. Charles had had an awful time getting an apartment so they got one with only two rooms. The boys slept in one room and the girl in the other, and Charles and his wife slept on a divan in the living room. Johnny Butrovich and Charles have been friends for years. They got a letter from the man who had sent Charles to Fairbanks and the letter suggested that Charles should apply a position at the head office.

Audrey says that she feels like they haven't learned enough about Charles himself. They have heard about his mining and about the time when he first came into the country, as well as about the time when he was in the legislature but now Audrey wants to know more about his public offices.

Charles says he's done everything except for tended a bar. He has tended one on the wrong side but it cost him too much money and he quit. He has done everything else: he has worked in a bank, he helped undertake at one time, he has washed dishes and cooked and everything else. He served at the City Council and served as a city magistrate, also he was elected to be the mayor a couple of times. Then he was appointed to be a superintendent of Alaska Road Commission, in which he served for several years. He worked summertimes as a general foreman and mined or prospected all winter, sometimes by himself and sometimes with others.

Then the marshal was going to die in a day or two and Judge Nolan? asked Charles to raise \$35,000 dollar bonds to cover the bond and said that if he could, he'd appoint Charles to be the marshal. Charles became marshal and served for 10 or 9 years. He was under [Presidents] Coolidge and Hoover, but when Roosevelt came in, Charles submitted his resignation. After being a marshal he worked for "the

company” for a while. There was lots of work in doing income tax returns. Many boys “around here” were immigrants and paid Charles to write their letters in English with a typewriter. Charles made a very nice living with that. He mined too and had royalties and interest coming from here and there so he made by. He was in [the Territorial] Legislature in 1947 and went to the Senate. He stayed there until 1955 and he was elected [unclear] in 1953.

At 28:36 Charles tells about his time in the Legislature and in the senate: they got \$20 dollars a day for [unclear]. They got \$15 dollars a day for 60 days from the Government and \$20 dollars and \$2 dollars for traveling each way. Then they got \$0.15 cents a mile but it didn’t cost them so much to get their tickets. They were allowed so much for mailing purposes. They made a living. Audrey Loftus asks how many sessions he was in the legislature. Charles started in 1913 and he didn’t get back until 1947, then in 1949, and 1953, 1955. That’s 5 or 6 sessions. He’s been a Republican for all his life and hopes to help elect Nixon. It will be the first time he votes for president since 1896 [?].

30:01 Audrey Loftus asks if there is anything else that Charles would like to talk about before moving on to the next section of his life. He says that he has done what he can and that he didn’t come [to Alaska] to work for wages but he had to do it. He’s been a foreman, a ship boss and a superintendent, and done all kinds of work “around here”. He’s driven team and all that. “You live the life there is to live here, it ain’t like Outside, you know.”

Audrey says that what interests her, and what many people might not know, is that Charles played in a troupe of entertainers. It started with singing with a local group that put on a Poor Butterfly. [Unclear talking about the show and traveling.] Then he traveled with a lady minstrel [unclear about that]. Audrey wonders if he is so good at it because he was brought up without a mother. His mother passed away when Charles was 5 years old. Their oldest sister played the piano and every Sunday night they played hymn tunes before they went to bed. When they got older, all the neighborhood kids came there because the house was for the kids, not the kids for the house. It was a gathering place for the kids. Audrey asks who kept the house for them and Charles explains that they had an auntie who lived with them and then they had a hired hand, a colored woman, (unclear, Annie? Auntie?) Tibbs. Audrey wonders if that’s why he is so good at Negro minstrels, and he says he has had plenty of association with the colored people.

Audrey asks Charles to tell what his father used to say about the Youth Companion. Charles tells he had Harper Young People and St. Nicholas [I think these are magazines for young people] for “us children” and he wouldn’t have the Youth Companion in the house because he said it was run by the Copperhead. Copperhead was a person in the north who was fighting the administration [during the American Civil War, the Copperheads were anti-war Democrats based in the Northern states]. When he was 16 [?], he was in [18]97, he was in volunteer infantry as a common soldier and his first appointment was to be a sergeant major and then he got a commission by General Wagner [sp?] to be in his staff. [Unclear.] He was with the army the Gone with the Wind describes. [More about his wars.]

Audrey and Charles talk about Charles’ father’s letters that Charles still has and that will be going to David. [Break in the recording.]

At 37:12 Audrey asks Charlie if he knew anything about the Noyes regime that was said to be corrupt. Charles says that the winter before he came “up here” he met Bob Chips [?] in Chicago. He was very [unclear] but he found out that Charles was just a greenhorn asking for information, and so Charles got a lot of information out of him. When he came up to Nome, he staked [Jafet] Lindenberg’s claims that he didn’t any right to stake. A company was formed to restrict him [Lindenbeg] from mining. Alexander McKenzie had gotten Judge Noyes appointed and Noyes was just a rubber stamp who did what McKenzey wanted him to do. They jumped lots of rich claims. Noyes was an awful drunk, and Charles has seen him sitting on the banks and falling over. Charles, who had organized a Republican Party up in Nome, was very displeased that Teddy Roosevelt appointed a man like that.

At 39:16 Audrey asks about a fight Charles mentioned. Charles tells that there was a Kimble Claim and Hot Air that were too long and fraction were taken out between them. When the owners of the fraction went there to take a possession, they had a fight. A fellow named Gidda Harow [sp?] was killed out there. More talking about the claims. When they got into court, Judge Wickersham ruled that the claim could be 20 acres for placer mining.

[End of the recording.]