

Call number: 02-00-120 SIDE A

Short Notes and Bill Sherwin

Date: November 5-7, 1961

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Date of summary's creation: 10/28/13

Series: Harrie Hughes Collection

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

Harrie Hughes says that the following is a second part of Bill Sherwin's story of his life. Harrie says Bill came to Fairbanks in 1908 and has been there most of his time. He's sawed wood. Harrie asks how many cords of wood he cut during his time but Bills says he never tried to figure that out, although he kept some kind of a log for years. He cut cabin logs and railroad ties. A fellow who used to be a conductor at the railroad had 10 cords of railroad ties. Bill was sick from his stomach before he got the job done. He cut thousands of cords.

He had one contract up at Dawson for 2,000 cords for the Canadian Klondike Mining Company to whom he was drilling in summertime. He used their engine to saw the wood. He had an engine ordered from Lincoln, Nebraska that was 6 horse power. It didn't get to Whitehorse in time to come down with a boat so it got stuck there. Bill hated having to pay 75-100 dollars just to pack it to Dawson. He wasn't making money that time and he ran all the winter with a 2 horse power engine. It was a good engine but it was only 2 horsepower. Bill speeded it up to 850 [unit? Rpm?] and sent a letter to the company who couldn't believe he managed to make it go so fast.

He got it for almost nothing, \$100 dollar. He didn't figure to make any good money with it and had to tweak it to get it into good cutting speeds. He had a speedometer to measure the speed for that purpose. Finally, after tweaking, the engine was running 850 and Bill ran it all winter. In spring, he got anxious about the other engine and paid 75 dollars to the White Pass [Company] to bring it down. He took the [old] engine out of wood saw frame and put the 6 horsepower engine in. Jack Kager, who sawed wood with Johnny Birch in the early days, was Bill's partner that winter. Bill took 10 cents off from every cord of wood they sawed and tried to see if they made enough wages to eat. The new engine was

powerful [talking about the power]. They flew through wood. When spring came and the boats started running, Jack went down to Fairbanks into a partnership with Johnny Bats who had the Gilmore Station at one time. It was a motel and a train station.

7:21 When Jack got down to Fairbanks, Jack talked with Johnny Birch who had money at that time. Johnny made a proposition to Jack Kager. Jack had told about Bill and his 6 horsepower engine and so they sent a telegram up to Dawson where Bill was cutting wood, offering a sum of money for the engine. Bill's counter offer was accepted and so Bill sent the engine down in a way that it would arrive to Fairbanks when Bill got his money. Bill hated to do it because he knew Jack to be an upright man. Jack sent him a letter that said joked about Bill not trusting him much. Jack told that the engine paid itself back in 30 days. Those days gas was cheap.

Harrie asks about days when he cut wood all day and played cards all night. He wants to know if Bill made it through several days without sleep. Bill says he could go three days without sleeping much. Sometimes he sawed to 12 or 1am at night to help people out. Harrie asks about Bill's prospecting and working at a drill. He was the first driller and worked for the FE-Company [Fairbanks Exploration Company.] for 3 seasons and a summer. Last year he worked all winter, drilling a thawing hole for cold water thawing over at Chatanika. Albert Norlin was drilling at the same time with him.

11:32 Harrie asks if Bill resided mostly in Fairbanks those days. He says he bought "this place" in 1913 after the Chisana stampede. He was in debt at the time over a boat he built and when he went to Chisana. He made \$1,950 dollars in 10 days, which paid for lots of small bills. He started with the smallest ones first so he wouldn't have so many people to face. He felt like a fool when he walked on streets, but couldn't do anything because he couldn't pay. The stampede was in 1913.

There were about 30 boats from Fairbanks heading to Chisana, but Bill says he was the only one who got to work when they got there. Tom Dog [sp?] got up there but when he got there [unclear]. He had bad luck with the river because he didn't understand the water. Bill was fixing a boat when Cap [unclear] talked with him, asking if he was going to Chisana and told Bill he wouldn't make it up the Tanana on the boat he had. Bill told him that a young fellow is helping him with

the expenses of the trip and to buy a white steamer engine from Johnny Patton to put it in. Bill thought his engine was in too bad of a shape.

14:12 Harrie asks if Bill remembers the first cars that came to Fairbanks. He said Red Devil was one of the first ones to come in and then there was Piercero [sp?]. The Red Devil belonged to Quarterbench the barber and it came down from Dawson. Harrie asks who brought the white steamer into Fairbanks, and Bill says it was Laidi [sp? Laiti?] who was in canvas business. He brought in the white steamer and the Piercero. That was in about when Bill was working for the Tanana Vallery Railroad. Once in a while they had to go to Chena.

Harrie asks if Fred Parker bought that white steamer later. Bill says he did, and that Mrs. Patton went Outside and bought the other one, the one that Bill bought from a fellow named Bob Blibler [maybe Bibbler?sp?]. Bob sold it if he could go with Bill to that Chisana trip. Bill agreed to it. [Talking about the steamer.]

At 17:16 Harrie asks if Bill remembers the people who worked on those boats. Bill says he remembers a number of them. Harrie asks if he remembers Jack Hughes who got injured in the WW I and lost his eye sight. Bill says he doesn't remember. Then Harrie asks if he remembers Dan Noonan who worked at the riverboats around 1913. Bill says he doesn't remember. Harrie continues that he worked for Nookum [sp?]. Bill says he can't remember the name. Bill was working at the steamers. George Black was working at the same time with him, and Harrie says he drowned later. He had a regular stern-wheeler steamboat engine but she wasn't really fast. Harrie used to know him quite well. Bill says he knew George Black as well, but that they never seemed to associate. He played cards with nearly everybody in the country, including two or three Russians.

Harrie says that those days everybody minded their own business. Bill says that that's what he learned from home. Bill says one could talk with a stranger on a trail but one would never ask the stranger's name. Bill says he knows "hundreds and hundreds of people" when he sees them but doesn't know their names.

Once he was standing right in front of Bricks, looking towards the bridge. He heard somebody behind him and recognized the voice. It was a person he hadn't seen in 20 years but recognized the quality of the person's voice.

He bought his home in 1913. It was already built when he got it and the fellow's name who built the place was Carpenter. Carpenter built the Old Red-Cross Drugstore, where Lavery's burnt store is now, at the same time that he built his

house. Different people have told Bill that he used to order a little bit more lumber for the drugstore that was necessary, sending the surplus at his house construction. [Bill gives his address on State Street.]

At 22:41 Harrie asks when Bill and his wife got married. He says it was in 1930. His wife's full name is Blanche Edith Rich. Eva herself [she's present at the interview] says her name is Eva Blanche Rich. She is called Eva B. Rich. She says she was born in Minnesota "thank God" and came to Alaska in 1928. Harrie says it's Frank Young and Harrie Hughes, recording for Igloo no. 4. [Break in the recording.]

Around 25:49 Harrie says it's November 5th, 1961 and the Pioneer Visiting Committee is visiting Alex [unclear]. Harrie says it's at the 17-mile on the highway that goes south from Fairbanks. Alex has lived there several years and he is one of the old pioneers of the area. Other old-timers who were Alex's neighbors have moved away. Singing Swede Olson moved to Fairbanks and Frank Kasky [Kaskey? Caskey? sp?] went to live with his son in California. Alec's full name is Alex Kussoff and he was born in Russia in Kavkaski [sp?]. He came to Alaska in 1916. He's lived most of the time in Fairbanks area. He didn't do any mining or farming, except that he always had a garden. Harrie asks how Alex's life has been around Fairbanks and he says it's been all right. All his relatives are back home in Russia. Harrie asks if he knows other Russians who live in Fairbanks, and lists a few. Alex says he knows them all. Harrie says they want to record a little bit of Pioneer history so it can later be used for research. Harrie thanks Alex. [Break in the recording.]

Harrie's voice tells about the weather conditions during their visits and tells that Alex's home is nice but that he might be a little lonesome, and urges pioneers to go visit him more often. They are going to try to visit Alex in Christmas and bring in some Christmas cheer. [Break in the recording.]

Recording resumes at 30:25 by Harrie asking Alex his birthday which he tells is in October 1st and he was born in 1878. [Unclear talking.] Talking about Moose Creek Lodge that is on Bob Jones' ground. [Break in the recording.]

31:26 Harrie says it's November 6th, 1961 in Fairbanks, Alaska, and it's a meeting between State Department of Lands, the Bureau officials of the Land Office from Anchorage and the Pioneer Committee that is composed of Frank Young, Forbes Baker, Ted Loftus and Harrie Hughes. They are going to discuss development of Pioneer Park and Museum. The Department of Lands will come up with a set of

rules and regulations about the legislation to get the project started. [Break in the recording.]

[Unclear talking.] Frank Young and Harrie Hughes are at the home of A. G. Grape [sp? Great?] at [address given]. He is 73 years old and he was born in Nebraska. He came into Alaska in 1917. He doesn't have relatives in Alaska. His birth day is 4th of October. Harrie says Frank Young is a member of the pioneer committee and that even though Grape is not a member of the pioneers they want to help him and all the early day people. It's not charity, it's to help out each other. Grape says he has heard of the Pioneers but though they were a social organization for entertainment. He hasn't joined because at times he didn't have much money and didn't want to pay the fees. Harrie says it's \$0.50 cents a month and that they have mugup [food and drink] in every meeting which happen twice a month.

Harrie asks if Grape gets any social security or pensions and he says he doesn't. He used to get social security when he wasn't working. Harrie [or Frank] says that that's unemployment and not social security. Frank advises that Mr. Grape could apply for social security to get a check every month. [They look for his social security number. Talking more about Harrie and Frank helping him to file for social security. Then they help him with his tax notice where it's said that he owns his lot and needs to pay City Taxes for the lot. Harrie and Frank will help him with his bills and paperwork.] [Break in the recording.]

At 42:16 there is unclear talking. Mark [unclear] talks about Mike Stepovich. Once when Mike was a young man at the bunkhouse [this part is little bit unclear], it was his time to leave for school and so he woke up early in the morning and switched everybody's dentures around before he left. Everybody woke up and nobody's teeth would fit. Mark was born in Anchorage in 1921. He doesn't remember the building but has visited there since. Harry was born in England. [Unclear] and Kim were born there too. He came to Fairbanks in 1924 or 1925. There were around 1000 people working "here" at the time and less than 100 kids going to school. Discussion on whether there were more kids. [Break in the recording.]

44:42 It's November 7th and Harrie Hughes is with Frank Young at Bill Sherwin's house. They are going to talk about his early day pioneering in Dawson, Fairbanks and Iditarod. Bill came into the Yukon Territory in June 29th, 1898 when he landed in Dawson [from a steam boat?]. They prospected a year and a half around where the North-West Mounted Police used to be, on a pup near Dominion Creek. They

also prospected on Gold Bottom [Creek?] and on 26 Below Bonanza. There was nothing there, it was all on the benches. There was a little gold but not much. Harrie says that Bill told that he prospected a year and a half and that he later went to Dawson.

Bill tells that he worked for George Palmer for one summer and used to [unclear] had a deal with the NC-Company [Northern Commercial Company], the NAT-Company [North American Trading Company?], and an oil company there – Standard Oil. They had boats: J.B. Lightning, Oil City and one more. They used to bring big loads of gas and lubricating oil – everything they needed for running gas engines.

Harrie asks if Bill celebrated things like Queen's Birthday and participated in bicycle racing up there. He says he took a part in bicycling and [unclear] races and panning contest. He won a panning contest at Dominion [Creek]. That time he was working for Charlie Robertson on Gold Run, which is in Lower Dominion. Bill won the panning contest over 9 other people. He found four pieces of gold which were the size of hauls that one goes duck hunting with. The dirt had already gone through sluice boxes [and the pieces of gold were placed in it]. A fellow found 2 of the four pieces. Then another bucket of dirt was brought in and another fellow found two colors. The next set Bill found the colors. He knew that the gold can disappear [from the pan] without person even noticing it and fall to the bottom. He explains how he found that out when he was panning in places where other people had missed the gold. In the competition he panned a pan of gold in 35 seconds and knew he had gold in the bottom. He took his hand and dipped it in and got the gold [?]. [More talking about his method of gold panning. He was laughing within and very proud of himself when he beat the gray-haired miners.

[End of the recording.]