

Summary for H00-135-01

George Preston, George Goshaw, Charlie Wilson, and Alfred McLeod, with unidentified female interviewer in Fairbanks, AK on January 6, 1955

SIDE 1

The Immaculate Conception Church of Fairbanks, AK, marked its 50th anniversary today. In honor of this, George Preston is interviewed by an unidentified female interviewer in Fairbanks, AK on January 6, 1955. Preston was present in the community when the pioneering church was first built. He was not a Catholic at that time, but is now a very involved member in the church. He arrived in Fairbanks on January 4, 1904 and had just got a job with the N. C. Co. when the church was built. He was too much involved with his own affairs to recall the effect of the church's establishment. His first contact with Father Francis Monroe was after Preston got married, since his wife was Catholic.

The church was moved from 1st and Dunkle to its present location. Fr. Monroe was determined to move it, though some parishioners, including Preston's wife, signed a petition against the move. Monroe wanted to move it to be closer to the hospital.

Preston left from Valdez the day after Thanksgiving, 1903, and pulled into Fairbanks, where it was -50 F, on January 4, 1904. They stayed in Graehl for several days in a place Harry Graehl offered to them.

Preston recalls when St. Joseph's hospital was built in Fairbanks. There had previously been a small hospital at St. Matthew's Church, but with room for no more than 12 patients. Fr. Monroe was asked by several businessmen to start up another, larger hospital (St. Joseph's). Preston mentions that there was a wooden bridge across the Chena at that time, which was destroyed every year with breakup. During that season there was a ferry to get across the river.

The Northern Commercial Company came to Fairbanks in 1903 and took over Barnette's trading post, from 1st Ave. to 3rd Ave. Preston had had office experience in Scotland and the Klondike, and found that mining was not his lot, so he talked to Judge Wickersham, an acquaintance from Valdez. Wickersham took Preston down to N.C. Co. and introduced him to the manager. Howard Turner, the owner, gave Preston a job in May 1904. Other employees were Dick Wood (office man) and Jack Healy (store man). Preston was deliveryman and "general roustabout." Turner is still living, at 93 years old, and resides in San Francisco now. The store had an assortment of good for mining camps, but not all the variety that they have today. It was only after that spring that news went around that Fairbanks was a gold camp, and the store started to sell to a substantial number of people.

Preston met his wife in Fairbanks. She'd been visiting with an aunt and uncle in Bettles (on the Koyukuk), Mr. and Mrs. Charles Grimm. She was about 21. She came through Fairbanks on her way back to the States, and visited her sister Mrs. Richman, who had her first son, Bobby Richman, Jr., at that time. (Bobby Richman is now head of the company (N. C.?). This is when Preston met her. They were married a year later.

Preston originally came over from Scotland to the Klondike. He was there from the spring of 1900 to 1902, after which he lived in Vancouver for a few months. Then he went into Valdez, Copper River country, in the spring of 1903, to a new gold strike in the

Nizina country. Preston was working as a cook for the mining crew. When they got out there was news of strikes in the Tanana country and Susitna country. In Al White's Saloon there was proof of gold from Susitna, but not from Fairbanks. However, Preston's friend thought the Tanana reports were more plausible. Preston's partner was Jim Stewart (still living at time of interview). Nine men and 5 dog teams came over from Valdez to Fairbanks, and Preston's been here ever since.

George Goshaw is interviewed by an unidentified female interviewer in Fairbanks, AK on January 6th, 1955. He passes through Fairbanks every 3-4 years, on his way out of Nome.

Judge Wickersham was an early Fairbanks pioneer, says Goshaw. The Fairbanks district was the 3rd Division, extending from the coast at Valdez to Fairbanks (a.k.a. the Koyukuk District). Later, in 1908, Fairbanks became the 4th Division. Valdez remained in the 3rd Division. Wickersham was a handsome man, known to friends as Wick, and others as Handsome Jim. He held court with all the four divisions of AK. In summer, he traveled among them by boat, and in the winter by horse stage or dogs.

Wickersham was also one of the first to surmount Mt. McKinley. The peak was named, says Goshaw, in 1890 by one Dickey, who also named a lower peak Mt. Foraker, after Senator Foraker of Ohio. Dickey was an early pioneer in Prince William Sound. He developed copper properties but was never overly successful. This man was no relation to Don Dickey, the chamber manager in Fairbanks, who has a lot to say in the current development of Mt. McKinley.

Barnette came up Chena Slough in 1902, and started a trading post in the Fairbanks vicinity. When the camp came along in 1903-1904, he went into banking. There is a street named for him. Another pioneer Goshaw knew was in the Chisana stampede in 1914, and later became one of Fairbanks's commissioners, Mr. Cole.

Goshaw came into Skagway in 1902, then mushed into Fairbanks in 1904, and continued on to Nome, searching for gold. Fairbanks was a log cabin camp. All lumber was whipsawed. He's been in the Nome district for 50 years. Mrs. Mike Walch is the oldest woman resident of Nome, arriving in 1899. Peter X. Peterson (1899) and Nels Swanborg (1900) are others who still reside there.

Frank Wasky was elected the first delegate to Washington, DC in 1906. He arrived there in 1907. One of the first pieces of legislation was to put in a land office in Fairbanks and Nome. Wasky was a Nomite and a miner. Recently he's moved from Dillingham to Maryland where he had a small rock and mineral shop. Now he's returned to Dillingham for the summer. In Seattle he was entertained by the Nome, AK Club at the Arctic Club. He plans to visit Nome this summer, going as far as Kotzebue and Point Hope.

Goshaw tells the early history of Nome. In 1898 three white men, Lindenberg, Lindblom, and Bryntesen came up from Golovin on the report that an Eskimo had discovered gold in 1897. They went to Anvil Creek, near Anvil Mtn., where they found gold. In 1898 AK experienced its first stampede, and 20,000 were there the first year. The camp was known as Anvil City. In 1900 it became Nome.

The interviewer comments that Goshaw is a very progressive pioneer: he is a member of the Northwest Chamber of Commerce and the American Legion, and has been boosting for a road to Nome for many years. He's got a "John L. Lewis" look with a

strong face and eyes. He doesn't believe in living in the past, says Goshaw. To accomplish anything he thinks old pioneers must look into the future and help the young pioneers. He thinks a road to Nome from Fairbanks would double and triple the travel through Fairbanks. People could go up to Cape Prince of Wales and look across the Diomed Islands into Siberia, and see 2 oceans and the Bering Strait. A person could probably drive to Nome in a day, whereas it always took Goshaw about 20 days by dogsled.

SIDE 2

Charlie Wilson is interviewed by an unidentified female in Fairbanks, AK on January 6, 1955. Wilson has been in Nenana for 32 years. He arrived in Nenana in 1922. The Nenana Ice Classic was started around 1917 by the chief engineer on the AK Railroad, who drew out the tickets by hand. About 100 were sold. Today they use the same ticket design. It came about simply as something to do in the spring.

Wilson helped to build the first marine ways in Nenana (where boats are pulled out for the winter). Skids are laid down the bank for 1,500 ft... Wilson tells how boats are pulled in.

In 1922 and 1923 Nenana became the shipping headquarters for boats. There were only 4 boats on the run then. Two from White Pass--the Yukon and the Alaska—used to take tourists down from Dawson. The other 2 were owned by the Army, Signal Corps Division. General Jacobs and General Davis were in charge. These boats used to go up and down the river keeping lines of communication open and bringing supplies to the Signal Corps stations.

Don Peterson has 1 boat on the river this year. Black Navigation has 3 boats, the C.A.A. has 5 boats, and the railroad has its boats. The steamer Nenana just went up to Whitehorse, says Wilson. The steamer Tanana is also in use.

Nenana has changed a lot since 1922. There were 1,800 people there then. It was the head of the railroad until the bridge was finished in 1923. People then dispersed as work left the town. The railroad equipment was split between Fairbanks and Healy.

Wilson came up to AK in 1913; he had friends prospecting in the Stepford country. He walked from Valdez in April, just before breakup. Three people started out, and 2 went back. A walking man who packed light could easily overtake the N. C. Co. stages, which stopped every 20 miles.

Ed Farrell said prices along the trail were pretty high. Wilson says the nicer you looked the more they'd charge. He came into Circle, around Birch Creek, and was there for over a year. He went into the Army in the spring of 1917 and came back from France in April 1919. As soon as he got paid he was back on the road to AK.

Wilson retired from the railroad in 1946, after 26 years of service, and maintains a home in Nenana. They used Healy coal in the train engines; before that they used wood, when it was just the Tanana Valley Railroad.

He talks about the history of narrow gauge and standard gauge railroads. They used to run ties over the ice for transport during the winter. Sunbeam, a barge, ran in the summer. The Third Fairbanks was the first narrow gauge engine.

The Tanana Valley Railroad was owned by people in Fairbanks. It ran to Chatanika to most of the creeks. Most of the Fairbanks Exploration Company's stuff was

towed by this rail. Ladd Field, Eielson, and Big Delta still use standard gauge railroad to transport supplies. Local miners still use a narrow gauge railroad in Nome (Wild Good Railway), known as the "dog mobile."

Some famous old-timers in Nenana include Slim Avery, Sureshot Kennedy (who was a professional hockey player and baseball player when he came to Dawson), Piccolo Pete, Whistlin' Rufus, and Whisky Jack (Jack Borchard)—he manufactured 1,000s of gallons of whisky.

Alfred McLeod is interviewed by an unidentified female on January 6, 1955 in Fairbanks, AK. He came up to make money in the gold rush. He left Milwaukee and came to Vancouver, where he took the steamer Centennial to Skagway in the fall of 1897 (he arrived October 19, 1897, one day after Alaska Day). McLeod will be 79 years old next AK Day. He put in the winter between Dyea and Skagway that year. It's quite a steep long way up from Dyea to the foot of the Chilkoot Pass.

McLeod tells about a spinal meningitis epidemic on the Yukon side of the pass. He was stricken with it. The doctor, Dr. Frizell of L.A., had no medicines, only his knowledge. McLeod was laid up 4-5 weeks, in a tent, by himself. He had to keep his own fire going. The only medicine they had was contraband whisky that Jack Conway was bringing into Dawson. McLeod said he could drink it all day and it wouldn't affect him. He mentions that Hudson Bay rum was a cure for colds.

The interviewer says she's impressed by the unselfishness and generosity of old-timers. McLeod tells about when he reached Lake Bennett and Dr. Frizell drowned (he thinks). He was trapped on the ice with his dog team when the ice broke up. They tried to get out to him with boards and boats, but couldn't do it.

There were special seats for miners with packs on their backs on the trail, to rest the packs on without taking them off. McLeod says 55 lbs. was quite enough for him to carry at one time. Also in use was the sleigh and G-pole. All the supplies were in the sleigh and the person would hang on to the pole and try to make sure he didn't get caught under the sleigh. The interviewer comments that the 52nd anniversary of the gold strike is approaching.

McLeod tells the story of the "Baby Stocking Fund." In 1908, nearly all mining was drift mining; some was open cut. There was a man from Outside, Washington state, McLeod thinks. He'd been working in Ester for the Berry brothers for just 30 days when he was killed. No one knew him but in his effects was a baby stocking. When they wrote to his wife, she said she'd been missing that stocking, which belonged to her baby daughter. In 3 weeks time, the Alaskans raised \$7,500 for her and the child.