

**Summary for H00-135-03**

**Harry Badger, Bentley Falls, Alexander Malcolm Smith, Mrs. George Gasser are interviewed by an unidentified female in Fairbanks, AK in 1955**

SIDE 1

Harry Badger is interviewed by an unidentified female in Fairbanks, Alaska on January 9, 1955. He started raising strawberries 25 years ago (he's known as the "Strawberry King"). He used to bring down 15-20 crates a day. The plants were a cross between native AK strawberries and a strawberry from the lower 48.

Badger was living in Burlington, WA when he first heard of the strike in the North. Fellows that had gone up north in 1897 came back in 1899 with thousands of dollars. Badger couldn't resist going up in 1900. Down in WA, he'd been trying to dig out fir stumps that Bill McKay's Logging Co. had left behind.

Badger first lived in Dawson for 3 years. Then he heard about the strike in Fairbanks. Barnette, who'd come up to start a trading post at Tanana Crossing, had gotten stuck at Fairbanks and unloaded there. Pedro had a good prospect but no pay at that time. This was enough to convince Barnette, though, to send Wada over to Dawson proclaiming 9 ft. of pay dirt in Fairbanks. Pedro let them get down in his hole, where they got 3 cents a pan, not pay dirt but a good prospect. Wada was then threatened to be hung. They settled issues with a miner's meeting back then. Badger was chairman of the meeting, and the men decided to let Wada go this time.

Barnette had 17 tons of flour in his store, which he wouldn't sell unless you bought 3 cases of canned vegetables with each 50 lb. sack of flour. The order would then be \$75. The miners decided Cap better sell his flour one sack at a time and put up notices to that effect. Within ½ hour all the men were lined up to purchase flour.

The first rumor Badger heard of any gold was on Fairbanks Creek, eight above Discovery. Bob McChesney, who later became the first editor of the Daily News-Miner, and Badger walked out to check it out. They asked them what they had and the people said to get off the claim, which was breaking the miner custom of honestly sharing information. So Badger and McChesney went up on the hill and ate their lunch. They waited until the miners went to bed, then Badger stole down and got a handkerchief full of dirt. They panned it in a greasy frying pan up the creek and got \$2.50. They went back to Fairbanks and spread the word. A few days later a strike was announced on Cleary Creek close to the mouth of Wolf Creek. Badger went down there and talked to Lon Doggit, who was running a long-tom. They had to clean the long-tom and hopper every 2 hours, so rich was the dirt.

Badger came back to town and started a real estate business. Fairbanks elected a town recorder, and anyone who staked a lot had to enter it with the town recorder for \$2. You had to build a cabin within 30 days on your claim, though you could get a leave-of-absence to go to Circle for food.

Badger tells about a big Swede called Oley, a friend of Judge Wickersham's, who hauled 700 lbs. of supplies on his sled (he had no dogs). His moccasins were slippery going up a hill and he couldn't stay upright, so he put 300 lbs. of the load on his back to hold him down until he got over the hill.

Badger doesn't like AK as much as he used to, especially in the towns, but he remembers never locking doors, etc. He wouldn't trade his years in the North. He lives on Badger Ranch on Badger Rd., where he's lived for 38 years.

He says that they pulled sleds by their neck from Skagway to Dawson, except on Lake Bennett he acquired one dog. They were 40 days on the trail, camping out every night. He arrived in Dawson March 5, 1900.

He came to Fairbanks by dog team. He went from Dawson to Fortymile, up to Joe Creek, into the head of the Goodpaster River, which they followed down to the Tanana, to Fairbanks. Badger will be 85 on his next birthday.

Ben Falls, of Livengood, is interviewed by an unidentified female in Fairbanks, AK on January 9, 1955. L. Tom Carr was another prospector from Livengood interviewed on a previous show.

Falls came north in 1901. He landed in Whitehorse, from Vancouver. He helped to build the river steamers built for passengers going to Dawson. He did the joining work for a year. In 1902 he helped to build another boat that went up the Koyukuk River.

He built himself a small boat and poled up to Coldfoot when he heard about the strike there. It was pretty expensive country, and he didn't find much. He met a man named Gandolfa, a well known real estate salesman in Dawson, and they both intended to go back down to the Koyukuk together, on Falls's skiff back to Dawson, but decided, since Gandolfa had a horse, to go overland. Gordon Bettles and Bill Dutchmore traveled with them and got to Ft. Hamlin on the Yukon (now Stevens Village says Falls). The only person there was an old Indian chief, who they got some food from, as they were pretty hungry. Bettles, who the town is named after, used to be an editor in Detroit, but was a miner while in AK. Ft. Hamlin was 6 miles below the mouth of the Dall River. It wasn't really a fort, but this chief had a big cabin there.

They heard about a strike in the upper Tanana and they traveled down to Rampart and did some work for a man named Sam Heater, cutting hay for his horses. They stayed until February, when they started up the Tanana River. They came across the divide from Rampart, across Ben Gulch and down Baker Creek and onto the Tanana. Heater was hauling a load of freight by horse and sleigh and they helped him out. He just got up to Nenana when he had to get back to haul feed for the horses. So they took a little sled down to Chena.

There wasn't much of Chena or Fairbanks; both had a row of cabins, but Fairbanks had Barnette's post. This was the winter of 1903. People were leaving by the 100s in the spring, building rafts to go down to Circle. A hundred or more horses died of starvation. Falls kept his alive on lake grasses. The next summer he used it for prospecting. A man told him where he thought there'd be good country, so they took off searching for it, where Livengood area is today. They were in Beaver country, which was pretty close by. His partner was John Patterson, who was much older than Falls. He was up in that country long before Falls, because he'd heard it was good country from John Minook, a "half-breed Indian" who Big Minook was named after, and who was the discoverer of Rampart and Fortymile. Minook was with Weatherspoon on the Geological Survey from Circle or Eagle to Rampart.

When Falls returned to Fairbanks he helped to build the town. More recently, there was a panning contest in Fairbanks and Falls won it, because he certainly didn't want the man from the F. E. Co. to win. Now he's showing tourists about panning.

## SIDE 2

Alexander Malcolm "Sandy" Smith is interviewed by an unidentified female in Fairbanks, AK on January 9, 1955. He's 93 at this time. Smith was with the radio show last week and he continues his story. He's back in AK for the summer.

His partnership broke up after he'd pulled his partner out of a 214-foot deep hole. He then went over to Wild Creek in the Koyukuk country. They had a miner's meeting and Smith was elected commissioner of the meeting. Mike Galligan was the secretary of the meeting. Smith recorded all the claims and gathered about \$4,000 recording fees. He started a roadhouse, a store, and a wood business. That winter toward spring, they all "struck water." Previous to that, men had been bothering Smith for a post office and he'd been writing to Washington, DC suggesting names for the P.O. Finally Washington decided to call it Amalcolm, after Smith. The boys razzed him for that.

An Indian came over with his wife; they put them up. He wanted to see gold so they showed him gold. Then he asked for a map. On the map he pointed to a place and said it was a creek full of gold (this turned out not to be true, as Smith found out).

A young friend named Bill, who now lives in McCarthy, and Smith went down to Michigan Creek and floated a tree down to Bettles to build a boat. Smith sent all the post office equipment back to Washington. They were afraid to put their boat in the water, because everyone told them they were building a coffin. They started up the John River, and soon encountered some rapids, which they had to pull the boat around. On the second day they both sat in the tent in the rain all day. Finally they reached the place the native talked about and discovered that there was some kind of iron, not gold, in the creek. Bill thought it was gold (and thought they were both rich) until he got a closer look.

Next they went over to Anaktuvik Valley to hunt; they were perhaps the first white men ever there, says Smith. They started back down the river. On the second day they had to shoot through 2 big boulders in the middle of the river. They made it through safely, but water washed everything but a sack of beans and a sack of flour out of the boat. They also found a few utensils and a jar of matches on the beach.

Later on they were guiding the boat through rocks on the river. Bill fell in the river when Smith let go of the boat accidentally. Smith couldn't help but laugh even though Bill could have died.

They reached the mouth of the Colville River. They were caught in ice, drifting east and west. They ate sprouts off the beans and finally constructed a sail and rocked the boat, which helped them get to shore. The dogs ran up inland a quarter mile to a willow tree—they seemed very happy to be on land. They started to Barrow, 450 miles away, and they couldn't get enough driftwood to cook the flour. They'd use saltwater and just warm it up.

Smith ran ahead of the dogs. Suddenly they stopped, up to the knees in something. It took him 2 hours to get out; it was petroleum. Smith thinks lots of prehistoric animals were stuck in that.

They looked around for a couple days. Some Eskimos came along, going from Herschel Island to Barrow, and saw the tracks of the white men (they knew by their track size they were white) dripping with oil. They reported to traders at Barrow that there were 2 crazy white men wandering around back east.

Finally they made it to Barrow and Charlie Brower nursed them back to health. When they got ready to go, Brower gave them some new dogs, new grub, and a little sled. They started down toward Cape Lisburne. When they reached the Utakok River, which reaches to the summit of the Brooks Range, they discovered one of the largest coalfields anywhere.

They were then caught in a storm about 20 miles from the summit. They'd sleep in their sleeping bags in 20-minute shifts, and then walk around the sled. Eventually, their breath froze the sleeping bags up, so they huddled all the dogs around them and threw a canvas over themselves. On the third morning, Smith heard some dogs, so they started out and in ¼ hour they ran into a little igloo with Bering Sea Eskimos in it. Twelve dogs and 14 people had been in it for 7 days and 7 nights. Smith told them they were headed to Point Hope. Though the Eskimos said this was not a good idea, they started out anyway; they had no dog feed. [The recording cuts off here.]

Mrs. George Gasser is interviewed by an unidentified female interviewer in Fairbanks, AK on January 12, 1955. She's a long-time resident of Fairbanks, and a worker at the USO.

She came to AK because her brother represented the Seattle Yukon Transportation Company here, and others wanted to do something nice for him, so they asked her if she'd come to AK. She came up and visited him at St. Michael for 10 days, then returned to Seattle.

The next year she went again. After that she came up and stayed with her brother for a year while he was mining. He said he'd buy her a return ticket to Seattle, but not a one-way. So she stayed in AK. Two years later Mr. Gasser came to the agricultural experiment station in Rampart, and she's still here.

Mr. Gasser was the plant breeder at the experiment station, working mostly with grains. They had different grains from cold countries all over the world to experiment with. He was selecting for earliness and hardiness. This was before the Matanuska experiment. The Rampart station was the first of its kind in the Interior, set up by the federal government. Later the Matanuska and Fairbanks stations were started. There was also a station at Sitka that worked mostly with fruit trees and berries.

Fred Rader cleared the land and built the station at Rampart, and did some experimenting. He came from and returned to CA. Gasser succeeded him. Dr. Georgeson selected the site originally, but Mrs. Gasser is not sure why.

She says they had excellent results growing things that didn't "winterkill." Wheat, oats, barley, broom grass, Kentucky bluegrass. They had to sow some of the grains in the spring, but the results were wonderful.

Mrs. Gasser says that she's heard of AK-grown potatoes turning black when you soak them in water, though she's never seen it happen with their Rampart potatoes. They've exploded in her over before, however; she says it's because they're mealy.

The SYT was one of the first transport links with AK, which was established as soon as the first boatload of gold reached Seattle. Judge Wood, Seattle's mayor, went

down to San Francisco and hired the Humboldt to come take the crowds up to St. Michael. One riverboat, the Seattle, was build at Dutch Harbor. There were some boats on the Yukon. She thinks they were the Hannah and the Sarah.

Mr. and Mrs. Gasser only came into Fairbanks to have their teeth taken care of. Other than that, they didn't leave, except the first year of their marriage—Mrs. Gasser cried in her sleep for her sister's children, so he sent her off to Seattle for the summer, and she came back and was satisfied. They spent 17 years in Rampart.

Mr. Gasser didn't take his yearly vacations, so he got a 5-month and a 6-month leave, during one of which he freshened up his studies at Berkeley. Gasser had to learn about local wild plants, because he was constantly asked about them. They were never bored. One time Berkeley and Harvard sent a man in to get lepidoptha (butterflies and moths). Mrs. Gasser spent the whole summer collecting them and learned to mount them.

They read a lot in the evenings, and also worked among the natives. Mr. Gasser organized a Saturday afternoon shooting class for native boys, to shoot at marks. Mrs. Gasser always had cocoa and cookies for the boys, and every Saturday a few native girls would come across the river to wash the dishes for her. They gave Christmas parties, with presents for the children. They liked blocks with letter on them best.

Mr. Gasser later worked at the experimental station in Fairbanks.