

Harry Badger 2 oral interview in UAF Rasmuson Library Archives

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Tape H00-135-03 dated Jan. 9, 1955

Transcribed by Ron Inouye, Aug.22, 2010

A = unidentified female announcer; HB = Harry Badger

A: We have in the studio as our guest Mr. Harry Badger, often referred to by the people of Fairbanks as the "Strawberry King".

Mr. Badger, would you tell us when and the why of that name?

HB: I started raising strawberries about 25 years ago up on a ranch; I had a good many of them. I used to bring down 15 to 20 crates a day, kept that up for about 25 years.

A: These plants, I understand, were a cross between a strawberry that were brought from the states and the native strawberry?

HB: They were.

A: Where was your home in the states, and what brought you to the north?

HB: My original home, do you mean?

A: Yes, your original home or where were you living when you first heard of the north and decided to come?

HB: I was living in Burlington, Washington, when I first heard of the strike up here in the north.

A: How did you hear of that strike -- by newspapers or radio?

HB: No. There was some fellows that came in here in 1897 -- I didn't come 'til 1900 -- and they came back in '99, fellows that had never had over 2 or 3 dollars in their pockets at one time came back with 3 or 4 thousand. And I couldn't resist the temptation; I said, "I'll go over and take a try at it." So we did.

A: You'd been doing some work in Washington, hadn't you...

HB: We were trying to dig out some of those big fir stumps there over at Bill McKay's cut off logging country; it was a pretty slow job. It would take about a month to get one of those stumps out. Of course you had quite a lot of ground cleared when it was out, but it was a big job.

A: Where did you first make your home in the north?

HB: Dawson.

A: You remained there for how many years?

HB: Three years.

A: And then?

HB: Then they heard of a strike down here. The man with Captain Barnette that came up the river to start a trading post up at Tanana Crossing got stuck in the river, the water was too low and he unloaded here in Fairbanks. And he had a big stock of goods, and there was no customers.

✓ So Mr. Pedro (had) a good prospect on Pedro Creek but no pay at the time, but it was enough for Cap to send the Jap by the name of Wada up to Dawson to report 9 feet of pay dirt here, that's 9 feet up into the creek. That was richer than anything we had there. Measured by a pan or a shovel—a shovel full of dirt is a pan -- and 9 feet of pay dirt that would go 25 cents to the pan was pretty rich. So we came down here to see about it.

A: Did you find that there had been a strike made when you arrived?

HB: There was a good prospect; that was all. Mr. Pedro let us go down in his hole. We scraped the bedrock and got 3 cents a pan by scraping bed rock which was not pay but a good prospect.

A: There were many of the miners that came to Fairbanks from Dawson at that time on that rumor of a gold strike. How did they feel about it?

HB: They didn't feel very good about it. They threatened to hang the Jap.

A: Were there any courts or law here at that time?

HB: No, there was nothing. We made our own laws as we needed them with a miners' meeting. They called - put up notices for a miners' meeting - they'd all gather at the designated place, they'd elect a secretary and a chairman. The verdict was rendered by the bunch that was there.

B: How did they handle the case of the Jap? I understand that they really felt so against him that they wanted to lynch him, but that he was brought to trial.

HB: He was brought to trial, all right, and he was pretty near scared to death. I really don't think that they intended to lynch him; I think they intended to scare him, and they did - they succeeded thoroughly. I happened to be chairman of that meeting, and the poor little fellow just come up to my shoulders, stood up under my arm, and he was shaking like a leaf.

B: Well, was there a verdict rendered?

HB: Oh yes. They said they'd let him go this time, not to do it again.

with gravel on it, but they can't farm unless they can have access to their places right quick.

I packed my grub on my back from Fairbanks up there for the first couple of years.

A: I didn't ask you how you came to Dawson, whether it was by riverboat or, and also how you came from Dawson to Fairbanks, did you come by riverboat?

HB: We pulled a sled by the neck, from Skagway to Dawson, excepting on Bennett I acquired 1 dog. The other fellows - there were 8 or us, 6 of us in the party, and they pulled their own sleds, 2 men to each sled, pulled it by hand. We were 40 days on the trail. We camped out every night. We landed in Dawson on the 5th day of March In 1900.

A: And then you came to Fairbanks the same way didn't you?

HB: I had a dog team coming down here.

A: Oh, you did.

HB: We came down as far as the Forty Mile (River), and went up Jill Creek and from there across the divide into the extreme head of the Goodpaster River and followed that down to the Tanana, Tanana down to the mouth of this slough, and from there into Fairbanks. Forty-three (?) days from Dawson here.

A: Forty days into Dawson, and 30 days into Fairbanks. And now the trip from Whitehorse which would be a comparative distance can be made in 3 or 4 hours.

HB: Sounds (?)

A: Harry Badger, may I ask your age?

HB: Eighty-five (85). Eighty-five, my next birthday.

A: Eighty-five, I'm going to make a wish: If I should reach the age of 85 may I walk as straight and as spryly as you do, and be able to review the years with the same gleam in my eyes.

HB: (Laughter)

A; It's been a pleasure to be here with you this afternoon.

HB: Thank you.

HB: They had to build a cabin in 30 days, after staking.

A: Were there any cases where they could have a leave of absence?

HB: They'd get a 30 day leave of absence to go to Circle after grub.

A: Oh yes, that was the nearest point where. They...

HB: There was the nearest point where you could get any food.

A: How did they go buy grub? -- Dog team?

HB: Dog team, that was the only way to go, the only way there was of traveling.

A: Did any of them go just pulling the sled themselves?

HB: Well there's one old guy that - a big Swede, the called him "Ole", he was a great friend of Judge Wickersham's - he went after grub. He was a big, strong, six and a half feet tall, weigh about 300 pounds. And he put 700 pounds on his sled; he had no dogs. With 700 pounds on his sled, and he went alright until he got to where he had to go up the hill. His moccasins were a little slippery, and he couldn't keep his footing going up, so he took off 300 pounds off of the sled and put it on his back and that held him down so he could pull his load over the hill.

A: Another one of the real or mythical stories of the big Swede or "Ole".

HB: You're quite right.

A: How do you feel about your years in Alaska, that is compared to your life in the states before you came to the north, or compared to life in Alaska today?

HB: Well, life in Alaska today I don't like it very well especially around the towns. But my experience in the north has been something I wouldn't trade off for all that I missed outside. I like it so much better - the attitude of people. The first years here, we never locked our doors anywhere. We'd go in a stay for a week and leave our cabins wide open. The only thing we'd ever notice, sometimes we'd come back and find a set a dirty dishes, and somebody would say "Thank you for the meal."

B: Where do you make your home now, Mr. Badger?

HB: On the Badger Ranch, up on the Badger Road. Been there for 38 years,

A: You're still homesteading it or farming; I suppose out in your neighborhood there are still people who come out and live in the country, and feel that they're living in the wilderness, and that they're roughing it, having it tough.

HB: If they're having a tough time, they come out there. If they're not within 10 feet of the highway, why they want the road commission to immediately put a road in

with gravel on it, but they can't farm unless they can have access to their places right quick.

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HB: (Laughter)

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HB: Thank you.

HB: Well, I understand that they – what did they do? What about the flour and the supplies?

HB: Well, the Cap had about 17 tons of flour.

B: That's Captain Barnette?

HB: And he wouldn't sell any of that flour. If you bought a 50 pound sack of flour you had to take 3 cases of canned goods that weren't fit to eat, that was canned cabbage, and canned beets, and canned spinach. None of which were any good, at \$12 a case. That was \$36 out of a \$75 order; you had to have a \$75 order and take 3 cases of this stuff to get a sack of flour.

A lot of the fellows didn't have the price anyway, so we decided that Cap had better sell his flour one sack at a time and without any strings attached to it, which we passed by resolution and put up notices to that effect. Inside of two hours afterwards there was a string a half mile long walking in the front end of the store and out the back end, each with a sack of flour on his shoulder.

A: That was one way of getting around the....getting food for the miners, and at the same time sort of punishing the Jap.

HB: Exactly!

A: ...in a round about way.

Well, when and where was gold struck then in the Fairbanks district?

HB. The first that we got any (?) was on Fairbanks Creek, 8 above discovery. Bob McChesnick who afterward became the first editor of the News Miner, and I walked out there. We found the fellows on 8 above, went down like all prospectors at that time, everybody gave the other one information if they had it -- it was customary.

We asked them what they had then; they told us it was none of our business. I was kind of surprised. I said, "Well, taken a long walk out here, and there's hundreds of people that are trying to find out whether there's any pay in this country or not. Let me take a pan of gravel... [They said], "Get off the claim and stay off it!"

[I said], Alright. So we went up on the hill, sat down and ate our lunch, thought it over a while. We sat there until the guys went to bed, the smoke quit. I sneaked down the hill with a bandana handkerchief and scooped up what earth I could carry in that handkerchief off of this dump.

We went up the creek and found an old greasy frying pan and got 2 dollars and a half.

A: Sounds like quite a pay streak.