

Call Number: 02-00-62-14

John Howard and Ted Lowell Interview on November 17, 1964 in Fairbanks, Alaska

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Notes: Original on 7 inch reel, copy on CD

The recording begins with a Harry Hughes telling another man that anything he says may be used against him. There is laughing. Hughes says the date is November 17, 1964 and the time is 12:04 pm in the afternoon. In the house of Harry Hughes at 1920 14th St. he has an old friend of his Johnny Howard formerly from Cordova and McKinley Park Alaska. With him is Ted Lowell, dog musher, mail carrier, and marshal. They are going to spin a couple yarns for the pioneers. He tells Ted to ask Johnny questions. Ted asks Johnny what day he was in Cordova. Johnny arrived in 1920 at 7:00 in the evening from Minneapolis. He says he went from Minneapolis to Seattle where he stayed for four days then got on a boat. He had a job for a man named Galen doing fence. Sheldon was not with Galen at the time. Galen just bought the transfer company from Captain Lathrop. Cap went into the building business and then he sold his business to Galen. He was there off and on until 1933. He used to work in McKinley Park. They used to go up to Chitina for three summers on the Richardson Highway. Then the business got sold out to Oscar Friedman. Then they bought the franchise from Kennedy in McKinley Park. Ted asks if he was driving the time that [inaudible] and Art Edison worked there. Art was manager there. John worked there for three summers. The company he worked for brought the concession from Kennedy so he moved to McKinley Park. Johnny says that was in 1926. He was in McKinley Park for 17 years. He mostly worked in Cordova in the winter time then come to McKinley in the summer time. Then he took over the horses and then he got the place from Dragic then he built a place of his own down there. He had the horses for 89 years. Then the company got sold out and that was the end of the McKinley Park Tourist Transportation Company. John left the park in 1941 then he worked for George Black in 1942 and then in Fire Control in 1943. Ted asks John what George Black called John and the man in the room says John was known as Eagle Eye. Lena was on the boat that year. That was after John got married. Lena got sick. John says she was on the boat down there and the boat was closed in and tipped. When she had to do the work on the table she would always stand tipped over. It seemed to have affected her ears. She was pretty sick there for a while. He thinks that was from standing on her lopsided boat.

At 5:56 of the recording the man in the room says that George Black told him that John had to put a rope on him every time he went near the rail and Lena would stop work and watch him to make sure he didn't go overboard. John said George wanted him to go on a little rinky dink boat full of cable and go down the river and he wouldn't do it because John can't swim and he says he never was much on the water. John says he took all kinds of pictures and that the Kantishna is a very crooked river. John says Mt. McKinley was right there and in half an hour it be far away. It was a swift river. John used to go all the way to Matilna [?] Lake during the war time. He took four big Cats and all kinds of parts and oil.

That is a tough job to get the stuff and the river was shallow. Ted asks him what year John and Lena got married. Johnny says he can't remember either and there is laughter. He is told to not let Lena hear the recording. The man in the room asks Johnny where he was born and he says Wausau, Wisconsin. He came to Alaska in 1920. He landed in Cordova. Johnny says the farthest he has been has been to Wiseman and Meadows. Ted says he went up there for vacation one time. Harry says that one time he and Lena took a bunch of nice pictures and it was during war time. The censors cut them all out. Johnny says he had pictures at the pump station. He says they cut out the whole business when they were leaving the pump station. Johnny says it was an awful trip up to Kantishna. He went 24 hours with no sleep. He stayed at the bottom of the hotel. Ted says that George was a hard worker. Johnny says he wonders what would happen now if George woke up and seen the Petersons and stuff with the big kettle ax and all the big stuff. Johnny says George used to take out bad nails and keep them because he might have to use them for something else. He says one time the wheels got loose on the boat and the nets got loose and they stripped the fence. He had to make 24 boats out of scrap iron. George never got excited. One time they were coming up the Tanana and George saw a big timber down there that had washed down. From the boat it looked good. They were there for a day and a half and when it came together it was all rotted. George was going to use it for jacking up the boat.

At 12:00 of the recording Johnny asks the men if they have had enough. Harry says no and then asks Ted if he minds if he asks Johnny some more questions. He asks Johnny if his wife was cooking in the park before they got married. Johnny says yes. Harry asks about the savage camp and the tourists and the game. Harry says Johnny has thousands of feet of game pictures. Johnny says in the park they had forty four tents with rooms for two people and beds on each side. There were stoves in the corner. They were typical tent houses. 12 by 14 feet. Johnny says when he first got there Fitz Nargbarg [?] was the head ranger. Fitz is in anchorage now. After that Lou Corvey was the ranger then. Johnny says that wasn't right because Lou just started to work there for about two years. Grant worked there when Johnny started in 1926. Grant Pearson. Pearson put in all that time so he was in line for the chief ranger job. Of course Harry J. Leake came from Montana and he and Galen....[trails off] they went and put Lou in. Johnny didn't like that. Grant was transferred down to the monument around Sitka. Grant came back again and Lou quit and John Romar got to be chief ranger. Grant got to be superintendent. Johnny says he never thought Grant was capable of that job. Harry says that when Johnny went to the park there was a lot of sheep. Johnny says there thousands of sheep and later years they got thin. Johnny says he and a guy went to 66 and the new guy had never seen sheep before. He counted 400 sheep from savage camp to 66. After that you were lucky to see four or five. Johnny says the wolves kill sheep when they go from mountain to mountain. Harry asks Johnny if Urie was there when he was there. Johnny says yes. Johnny and Urie never got along because Urie would always tell that the wolves didn't kill any sheep. Urie says the only ones the sheep kill is the sick ones and the crippled ones. One day Johnny and a guy were going to set up camp and Johnny saw a big black wolf. When the rangers first started they brought guns with them and they would shoot the animals. The park put a stop to that. He says he went around a bend and met Morrie and he asked him if he had a gun. Johnny asked for the gun to kill the wolf. Morrie said no. Johnny said that the wolf was waiting for the sheep up in the mountains. This was at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. All summer they fought back and forth. In the fall when Johnny was closing up camp him and Lena were alone and they saw a couple of wolves. In the

summer time the sheep leave that one range on the right side of the park and go up the other side for the summer and in the fall they come back again. They saw the wolf go by and then they see a few lambs come. One of the lambs go out and went up the side hills. The wolves never showed up and Johnny told her that the wolves will show up and three more wolves come over. Johnny went up the latter on top of the cook's house and he watched the wolves. The wolves went right up to the place where the lamb disappeared. He got in the car and he walked up there and he got up there and the three young wolves were eating the lamb. He sent the two young ones away and he grabbed the lamb and he put it on his shoulder and took it home. He asked for Urie because he said he had something important for him. Urie came over at 5 o'clock and he brought out the lamb and he showed it to him. Johnny told Urie to ask his wife about the story. Urie said Johnny might have something. Johnny says that it happens all the time. Urie took the sheep with him. They met six weeks after that and Urie had eaten the sheep. That convinced him.

At 20:50 of the recording Harry Hughes mentions pictures when wolves had killed forty sheep in one place. Johnny says he never saw the pictures and Harry says he saw the pictures. The magpies and the birds and the fox, everything was eaten on them. Johnny says the bear used to eat them too. Harry says the rangers kept the pictures a secret. The tongues were pulled out of the sheep and also the guts. Johnny says he found caribou that had been killed by wolves as well. Johnny says "isn't that a funny law?" Hughes asks Johnny about the scenery and the flowers and the sunset he saw with his wife. Johnny says all he can is beautiful. Hughes says when he was there were times when you couldn't look and not see 4 or 500 caribou. Johnny says he saw them for three weeks steady. He estimates he saw 25,000 caribou and the caribou average 20 miles a day. The group is looking at a map. Ted says that on 16th and Cushman he killed two caribou. Johnny says it's funny when he watches the caribou because they never stop for nothing. The slide right down gullies even though they could go around it. Harry says he walked around the area with Bill Taylor's outfit. With the Cat crew. Harry says they had him for pilot to take them through there. Johnny asks if that was Bill who got hurt and hit his head that one time in the early 1930's. Harry says he went with the Cat outfit to Caribou Creek when they took the dredge in. Harry says he helped built that one engine. Harry asks Johnny if he remembers how the outfit came to get all of the boats to work with when they through down the old power plant at Nenana. The boats were shipped up there and Andrew thought they were crazy. Andrew said "Put them in the creek." Harry says everyone in the country used those boats and you can't find one today.

At 25:20 of the recording Johnny says on that trip Bill hit his head up against something. Harry says it happened when everything fell down the glacier. Johnny says Bill was never any good after that. Harry says he has pictures of Bill from that trip that he can show them. Harry discusses a business transaction of Bill's in which the net profit of the land sold was only 8 cents a cubic yard. When they drilled it and tested the ground it was supposed to run 2 or 3 dollars a cubic yard. This was at Caribou Creek over beyond Red Top. Lee Swisher was there and also Bill Gilliam and Sandy [inaudible]. Johnny says that they didn't take out half of the gold or ore out of the land. Harry says Dalton was there. Harry asks Johnny if he remembers Bart Dushay [?] and how he kept his home brew. Harry says they all landed there in the evening and were all hungry. They hiked up to Johnny Dushay's. Johnny was all pleased because he hadn't had any visitors. He had a large room and around this room was a bench clear

around the room. He wanted them to stay and eat and they couldn't figure where they were going to eat or sleep. Johnny Dushay said first we have to go into the cellar and he had home brew in there that would knock your head off. Johnny says it was 12% alcohol content. Harry says Johnny spread the home brew around and little later they were all tired because they had been walking for miles and that Cat. Johnny told Harry to open a door and Harry opened the door and it was blankets piled clear to the ceiling. Harry says the first blanket he picked up he dropped because it was so heavy. There were 8 or 9 blankets sewed together. Harry said he didn't want to sleep underneath those blankets because he would suffocate. Johnny told them that he doesn't like to make beds. Johnny shook the blankets and folded it up three times then told them that the bed was made. There is laughter.

At 27:45 of the recording after telling the blanket story Harry says that was the time that fellow shot himself over at Glenn Creek. The man lit the lantern and hung it outside of his place, took the gun and shot everything up and then shot himself. He didn't shoot the dogs though, he turned them loose. Johnny Dushay sent the rangers over to investigate. Harry asks Johnny if he remembers the story of when Harry brought that brand new gun he brought from Seattle. The gun was a 32/20. Harry was going along the trail and he shot at something and didn't hit it. They were all making fun of Harry. The group went a little further towards the Clearwater and he shot five in a row. Bill came to pick them up and he couldn't find where they were hit. Every one of them was hit in the head and no one made fun of his shooting anymore. Harry says he was a little high the first time [Harry does not specify if the high was natural or of foreign substance]. A little further down the trail they got to Glenn Creek. Harry says he had to create a trail so they didn't dump the cats when going down with all of that machinery. When Harry got over to that canyon he looked over the hill it looked like a man standing over the hill and he looked like a prospector. He ran over to the Wannigan to get his gun and in the meantime the Cat was getting closer because it was moving because the trail was good. Harry went over there and he wouldn't shoot because it looked like a man with a turned up brim hat. In the meantime a foreman of Dunkel's grabbed the gun out of Harry's hands and emptied the gun in the side of the hill at a poor porcupine. They looked up to the horizon and here it was a wolf that looked like a horse going up the horizon. Johnny says Penny was a good talker and someone told her to keep quiet.

At 30:18 of the recording Harry says that Sandy came down to see them at that time. Harry describes the airfield where there were just two drums sitting over there at the flat river bar and Sandy was up above it over the side of the hill. Johnny says they would take the tourists down there and Sandy would give them an awful line. Johnny says one summer Sandy had a fancy set of silverware that someone had sent her from a European country possibly Romania. The silverware was so fine. Sandy sold it to some tourists. Somebody stole it and it was a big box. Six weeks after that they found the box on the side of the road. Whoever took the box must have gotten scared. After that Sandy had the old lace that she used to get from the old country and she never sold anything to anybody after that. Sandy threatened to kill Joe one time. Joe came to town and he wanted to come back with Harry. That's when they sold the mine and they had the papers made out so Sandy got 10,000 a year and Joe got 10,000 for five years. She wanted her hands on all of it and she was mad at Joe for making that deal. Harry says he got to visit with Joe Quigley before he died. He went to Seattle in 1957. Quigley died in 1958. Johnny was unaware that Joe had died. Joe was passed 90 then. There was an old lady taking care of Joe and she

was in her 80's. Joe sneaked over when Harry was getting ready to go and he asked Harry if he could get a suit case and go with him. The old lady heard him and got Joe by the ear and brought him back and told him he want going anywhere. Joe lived at 1037 Linden Ave. Seattle, Washington. Johnny discusses a nurse that came to the mine when Joe hurt his shoulder. She was from Fairbanks and Joe married her. She died too. Johnny wonders who got all of the claims and Harry says he never heard and didn't hear it from the court house either. Johnny says Joe had something like 3 or 400 patent claims. Harry says he drove by his house this year in December and there was no sign of life around. He was going to ask some of the neighbors about him. Harry stopped at a motel close to Joe's and Harry called Bob Bloom and he got mad that Harry didn't go right to his house because Bloom had a vacant apartment there. Bob Bloom lives in west Seattle.

At 34:20 Harry says he would like to ask Ted a little bit about him. Ted Lowell was born in Seattle, Washington and came to Alaska in 1926 on April 1st. Ted was married in Tacoma eight months before they decided to come to Alaska. Ted said he did just about everything in the book. The outstanding thing in his memory is when he operated trading posts in the Upper Tanana. Ted handled general merchandise, mostly food stuff and a little hardware. The customers were the Natives. When Ted first got there, there was only about a half of a dozen white people. Harry asks Ted if he remember John Hajdukovich's brother when he was in Alaska too. Ted says Milo was his cousin. Ted says that John had trading posts in Tanana Cross. Ted says John was the commissioner when he was there. Ted says he spent 1928 off and on up until 1935. After he went into prospecting. Ted says he never had any luck prospecting. In 1936 Ted bought the Heely Trading Post. The means of traveling back then in the summer was strictly by water on the Tanana River and dog team in the winter. Ted said he come twice a year and get the mail at Big Delta. Harry asks Ted what was around the Big Delta area at that time. Ted says there was signal corps station called McCartney and later they changed it to Grungler. That was the signal corps. Later it was changed to Big Delta and the road house was located where it is located right now, at Rika Walton's. John brought Rika Walton in as a young woman. Rika Walton came in on her own to cook for Chris's Bakery. Harry says he used to get a great big sandwich and a cup of coffee for a quarter. Rica then went to Big Delta to work for John. John at that time had the ferry crossing the Tanana. In the later years the Alaska Road Commission took over. John did own it. That was the only post office in the country for a good many miles around.

At 40:08 of the recording Harry asks Ted if he remembers what year they brought the first buffalo down there. Ted says 1928. Ted says he helped haul them out there. Ted donated two trucks and his own services. They hauled four buffalo, two on each truck. Ted has pictures. The buffalos were brought in from Montana. It was the Federal Wildlife that brought the buffalos in from the Department of the Interior. At one time the herd got up to about 30 buffaloes. It was supposed to be 520. Since the soldiers came in they knocked them off and several of them were killed accidentally. Ted says most of the buffaloes got lead poisoning. Harry says the reason he asked Ted to tell this part of the story is because Johnny spent some time down in buffalo center. Johnny says he counted 180 buffalo one time on the bus. They used to come back over the fall. Harry says the buffalo would walk up to house doors. Johnny says he heard that the buffalo were all the way up to Heely Lake. Ted confirms that statement. Ted compares them to caribou. Harry says Johnny used to live on birds and they would go with a .22

and just shoot birds and pick them up. Ted says there were a lot of birds back then. Johnny says he will tell a story. Johnny says he and Lena went out hunting one time a long while ago. They went up the highway getting birds from the falls. Johnny got out with the shotgun and would shoot them. Johnny is shooting and says he never misses. Johnny says he saw one bird fly up into a tree and it took him seven times to hit that bird and he lost his record as a marksman right there.

At 45:25 of the recording Harry says that one time he went to visit Johnny down there and they went down the trail to the campgrounds down by the Clearwater. On the way down there were trucks with a whole bunch of trucks and ammunition. There was also a little black bear and Johnny and Harry shot the bear away so he wouldn't get shot. Ted says they started the road about 7 miles from Clearwater when they had the big fire out in 1941. They were building the Alaska Highway then. Ted was fire warden at that time. The construction gang was the ones who started the fire. There were seven cats and that was the beginning of the road that went into Clearwater. That was their fire line. Johnny says he remembers talking to a guy who said he finished the road up after hours. Ted says he was on one of the Cats himself. Harry says they used to have really bad fires. Johnny says this year there is no fire at all up there. Ted says later on after he left the fire patrol they had a fire that burned through and did the same thing.

At 48:50 of the recording Harry asks Ted if he can tell him anything about the Gershell Indians. Ted says that the Gershell Indians were before his time. Harry says they are almost extinct now. Chief Johnny Heely was buried at Little Gershell. Ted says Little Gershell and Big Gershell didn't exist when Ted came in later. Ted says Heely Lake Natives and Sand Creek Natives were the only two small villages. Johnny says there were a bunch of them and it was a big tribe. Ted says 64 was the population of Heely alone and there were about 14 people in Sand Creek. There were also a few at George Lake. Johnny says the Natives picked a good place because there was plenty of fish and plenty of game. Harry interjects by saying he wandered down there once when the village was quite a village there. Ted says they moved out and some of them died. Harry says they had tuberculosis pretty heavy there if he remembers correct. Ted says there were quite a few old Natives there when he purchased the trading post. With the Alaska Highway being built a lot of the Natives went up to Dot Lake and Kennebecott.

Johnny mentions a preacher still having a camp there. Johnny says the preacher helped the Natives a lot. The missionary built the church. Ted says he used to go up to Scotty Creek with a boat and find muskrats. Ted says at that time there was hardly a beaver in the country and now there's beavers all over. Harry says for the benefit of people listening to the tape, survival was instinct. People didn't depend on search and rescue and people looking for you. When you started out you were on your own. The people today don't realize that. Mrs. Hyde tried to mother Harry when he was in Nenana. There is laughing. Ted says there was no communication between the Big Delta and Nenana. There were shelter camps every 10-15 miles. Harry says he remembers seeing the cabins. They had a stove a little wood and a guy could move in during bad weather and camp there. Ted says during those days everyone was traveling with dogs and horses on the Dalton trail. In Clearwater there was a roadhouse that was run by Smith and Maxy. The next stop was Heely. The trail 430 you could take the Tanana River and go over the hills and it was 35 miles over to Sand Creek. From there you went to 20 miles inside the Tanana.

At 53:57 of the recording Harry asks if Ted can remember some of the stage drivers when he was in the country. Ted says there were no stage drivers. Harry says there were and they used to head down from Black Rapids to Valdez. Ted says that was before his time. Ted says he remembers Bobby Sheldon. Ted says on the Richardson Highway there was the Richardson Highway Transportation company. Art Anderson was the manager. Harry says what made him remember was when he worked in 1937 for an oil drill at night. Harry says he used to wake the stage drivers up to go to Valdez. Billy Root was one of the drivers. Ted says that Billy used to run the Chatanika. Harry says Billy used to run the stage drivers. Ted says he drove the Chatanika around for a couple years. Ted says for many years he put in work as a freight driver between Fairbanks and Big Delta.

At 55:35 of the recording Ted says he got paid \$125 a month for carrying the mail between Fairbanks and Big Delta. Ted carried the mail twice a month. Ted said he would make Big Delta and get back to Fairbanks just in time to set out again. There is laughter. Harry asks Ted if he remembers the heavy snow and asks if it would ice up? Ted says he sure does remember the heavy snow. Harry says they haven't had that type of snow in recent years. Harry says he used to go out with those fine snow shoes and walk around. Ted says he remembers one time he started out from Fairbanks in a mail truck. He got as far as Food Line and he got stuck in a snow drift and he had to give the truck up. He got the dog team and started from there on. Ted says there a lot of good trails. The recording stops at 57:51 and resumes. Harry says the story with Ted Lowell and Johnny Howard was taken for the benefit of the pioneers of Alaska Igloo 4. With the aid of Harry Hughes, President of the year of 1964. Harry says he has had the honor and pleasure of taking Johnny Howard into the pioneers. They would like to dedicate the recordings to the Pioneers of Alaska's use only. John Howard and Ted Lowell give their consent. The pioneers can get access to the recordings by transcribing and requesting for historical uses. The historical society is a member of the organization and dedicated to the history of Alaska. The oldest tapes Harry has are 5 years old. The voices and sounds should be placed on metal records. The metal record is good for a thousand years. The metal record does not shrink or lose sensitivity or quality. Harry thanks them. The time is 5pm and Ted just called his wife and told her to have dinner ready. That portion of the recording ends.

At 1:01:40 of the recording Harry Hughes returns and says that this is a wasted effort. He is talking with an old timer and the record button was not connected. Harry says he apologizes. Harry says they lost one story but it did get recorded on the notes. The man being interviewed says that what he thinks would be interesting is if he would make a few notes of something that Harry wants to know. He says he could tell Harry more and more accommodating for the old times' sake. There is a female in the room and also another man with a heavy accent. Harry says something about Robert's house. The man with the accent says him and the man being interviewed are not related but are good friends. Robert lives in Livengood. The man being interviewed says he has had a lot of provisions and before his big house burned down they had a little house instead of emergency just in case of cold weather. The recording ends and then begins with Harry Hughes. He says the interview was with Tom Radovich [?] and Ben Fayls [?] with Judy Terry from the News Miner. He says the tape recorder failed to function properly so that tape will have to be taken later. Judy Brady got a very good story with her notes and her pictures. He says that is the end of the tape. Harry says he is preparing to go to the states and head

over to Alaska so this is one of the last tapes that he will take for the Pioneers of Alaska. The recording ends.