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Rededication of the Pedro Monument, Fairbanks, Alaska

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Notes: Originals on 3 inch reels. Master copies on CD.

Series name: Harrie Hughes Collection.

Harry Hughes introduces the recording, which is made at the Pedro Monument, at the site of the initial gold discovery in Fairbanks.

The Master of Ceremonies, talks about Bob [Robert E. Sheldon]: He is one of the youngest of old pioneers, who was born in Tacoma, Washington, in June 18, 1883. He first came to Skagway in 1897 with his father. Bob's father died in 1899, but Bob remained in Alaska, selling newspapers and working in Skagway, later in Juneau and Haines. While in Skagway, he became an Engineer in Charge of the Skagway power plant and built Alaska's first home-built automobile. The automobile is now at display in the University of Alaska Museum. Bob came to Fairbanks in 1908 and was an engineer at the Northern Commercial Company's power plant from 1908 to 1913. From 1926, he and his associates operated a [unclear] concession in Mt. McKinley National Park until 1940. In April of 1933 he was appointed a postmaster in Fairbanks and served for 8 years. Then he became an executive director of the Alaska Unemployment Compensation Commission for 10 years until his retirement. He was elected to the House of Representatives in the first State Legislature. He was a Grand Igloo trustee in 1926 and president of Igloo no. 4 in 1955. He joined Igloo no. 4 shortly after the igloo was organized in 1910. In 1920 he married Ann Bergman and the couple has one daughter, Mrs. Frances Ericson (sp? Erickson?), and two grand-daughters.

Bob Sheldon was personally acquainted with Felix Pedro and familiar with his trip from Circle to the present location to Fairbanks. The speaker introduces Robert E. Sheldon who is the guest speaker and will speak about the life of Felix Pedro.

Bob greets the audience and says he will cut his speech a little bit short since the preliminaries took so much time. It's a long story to tell how gold was discovered and how Fairbanks was found and Bob will tell it the best he can, but says that he won't hold it against anybody if they decide to leave for coffee and doughnuts. Then he tells briefly about the customary re-dedications of the Pedro Monument.

Felice Pedroni, known as Felix Pedro, left Italy to United States in time to hear the story about the steamer that landed in Seattle in the fall of 1897 with a ton of gold from Alaska. It fired the imagination of thousands of men all over the world as well as many red-blooded women. Newspaper reports gave the impression that there was more gold to be found from Alaska. One of the first people to come to

Alaska in that stampede was Felix Pedro. The gold came from Canada, from boundary of Alaska, but to get there one had to travel there via Skagway and the White Pass, or via Dyea and over the Chilkoot Pass. That's the reason for misconception that the gold came from Alaska.

Pedro didn't find much gold from the Klondike region but left prospecting across the boundary when the Klondike camp started to decline. He prospected for 2-3 years in the Fortymile-country, at Jack Wade District and in several others places where small amounts of gold had been found. He believed that there must be gold and searching for it was his passion. In 1901, he was at Circle City and that summer, together with his partner Tom Gilmore, and a couple of pack horses, dogs and food, they started out from Circle, hoping to reach the Tanana that they had seen on maps. They hoped to build a raft later and float to the Yukon where they could catch a steam boat. That time mining season ended so Pedro and Gilmore decided to return to Circle.

The next year they decided that Gilmore would remain in Circle to continue making money to fund Pedro's prospecting. Pedro took off with his dog and equipment and walked the same route as before. Finally Pedro stopped to have lunch on 22nd of July, 1902 near the site of the Pedro Monument, in the valley below. While he was preparing his lunch, he decided to do a little panning in the creek which is now known as Pedro Creek. He found gold in such quantities that it could be considered a strike. Pedro marked the spot and continued on towards the Tanana River. After a few hours of walking, he arrived on top of a hill which Bob thinks might have been the Engineer Hill. From the top of the hill, looking down to the Tanana Valley, he saw a steamboat on the Chena either tied to the bank or moving slowly. It was on the site where the Northern Commercial Company store now stands. Pedro made the best time from the hill to the Chena, as far as miles per hour are concerned.

The steamer was the Lavelle Young whose captain was Charles Adams, afterwards well known as a captain in the Yukon. He passed away only a few months ago in California. The boat was engaged in transporting trading-post supplies for a man named E. T. Barnette from St. Michael to Tanacross. Those days it was known as the Tanana Crossing. He was establishing a trading post there because of the Indians there. Mentioning a telegraph line was built from Valdez and Eagle by the Signal Corps. The steamer Lavelle Young did all right on the Tanana until it came to the point "directly south from where Fairbanks now is." They came to "the shallows" where the Tanana was spread out to many small channels – Lavelle Young couldn't negotiate the shallow areas when loaded – so they back tracked about 10 miles to the mouth of a stream they noticed on their way up, which we know as the Chena River. They ran up the Chena River, hoping to by-pass the shallows and get back into the Tanana further up, but found it was impossible for a boat that size and type, so they tied the boat up to a bank where the NC-Company now stands. Felix Pedro reported his find and Captain Barnette decided to establish his trading post right where he was and forget about the location further up the river. Barnette's trading post developed into a flourishing mining camp of Fairbanks, which grew into the second-largest city in Alaska.

Bob wants to dedicate Pedro Monument also to those pioneers who established Fairbanks that we the living can so comfortably enjoy today.

Master of Ceremonies thanks for the excellent review of the history of founding Fairbanks and states that the wreath is in loving remembrance of Felix Pedro and may his memory ever be green in minds of Alaska.

Introductions: Mr. and Mrs. Owen Neil [?probably Meals] whose name many might recognize as coming from Valdez, a Queen Miss Golden Heart, Favorene Barnette [?]. All the past officers of the Igloo no. 4 will not be introduced, but one past president is passing through Fairbanks: Ted Loftus. The master of ceremonies asks Ted to come and say a few words as he intended and to introduce the rest of his party. [Indistinctive talking from the audience, also clapping.] The MC thanks Ted and asks if there are others who would like to make introductions. [Nobody speaks.]

The MC talks about changes that have happened in Fairbanks: They have the Agricultural College, the Pioneer Park dedication is done, a Centennial designation of Fairbanks. He also asks all the pioneers to come to the Grand Igloo Convention on September the 17-20th, "this year".

Another speaker thanks President Harry and all the people who are not members of the Igloo but helped in arranging the gathering: Captain Montago (sp? Montague?) who provided men from the Highway Patrol. There are also Igloo members who have done lots of work but whom one seldom hears about: Linda Schafer who supplied historical material and Amante Hansen who supplied considerable amount of historical material. He also announces that coffee and doughnuts are served at the Nick Kupoff cabin ¼ mile down the road.

Father Murphy will announce the benediction. Father Murphy prays for the benefit of the Pedro Monument. The MC says that the ceremony is concluded unless someone wants to talk.

[Another snippet:] Harry Hughes's voice says it's July 22nd, 1964, the annual rededication program for the discovery of gold in the Tanana Valley by Felix Pedro. There are other discoveries of gold in Alaska between 1894 and 1902 that caused a great many stampedes: Nome, Iditarod, Miller Creek, Eagle and Circle. This brought many people to Alaska in the early days.

[Last bit of the tape is somebody testing the recording equipment.]