

Call number: 02-00-62-31

Mr. Murdo McCrae

Summary created by: Jacob Metoxen

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The recording begins with Harrie Hughes stating that Mrs. McCrae has to go home. Mrs. McCrae says she would like for Harrie Hughes to leave part of the tape. Mrs. McCrae leaves. The recording skips ahead to Harrie discussing how Judy took 3 or 4 exposures of people eating at the mess hall in Chatanika. He asks the men what their names are. One is Penovich, another is Alan Breese, Dave Johnson, and Raulph Monroe, Marvin Roads, Tim Leonard, Delbert Wells, George Laserenna [?], Bill Salmons, Gus Larso [?] from Fairbanks, Oscar travers. Those men are in the picture that Judy took. Harrie says the chef [Simpson] was in the background. The recording stops and starts again with Harrie and Judy driving in his car with music playing in the background. He says the noise in the background is an engine starting. They are going to drive in a new Econoline Chevrolet. There is even radio out in the wilderness. They are now at Chatanika dredge and Judy is going to take some pictures of the dredge for the Fairbanks News Miner. Harrie believes that the current year will be the dredging company's last. They are about 30 miles from Fairbanks on the Steese highway just above the town of Chatanika.

At 2:40 they are driving on Anna McCrae's car. The FE Company is finishing up this year. Anna is giving them direction and telling them that they can see the old town from where they are. She asks Harrie if he remembers old man McFarland. He had a home and ground. The company that went through McFarland's ground struck it rich. Harrie says most of the fellows who attempted to mine gold in the early days never got anything out of it. Murdo says McFarland held out for more money and the company went around McFarland's property. Anna points out the drag line and says it is pretty. Harrie says one good thing about mining is that after they get the gold out they can level the land out and use it for airplanes.

At 4:50 Murdo McCrae is explaining the dredging set up. He is talking about another barge with a pump behind the ones they are at. There are 2300 volts in the dredge they are currently at. Murdo says the power cable went up about 40-50 feet. Judy asks if there are any fish in the water. The creek isn't open. Harrie says they have just stopped at Chatanika training post. His name is Otto Bubenick. The civil defense took over the buildings. Murdo is talking about Jim Rudebom [?] and Harrie says he know him and his son. Murdo says they have a stove and he sat by the stove and the train started out. The train went to Fox and then Gilmore. Once in a while the train would stop and have a chat. Jim would hand them stuff that he had gotten for them from town. They'd back the train all the way down from Gilmore to Fox to go to Fox Gulch. They got to Scafferton at 4 in the afternoon. Murdo went to the train depot at 8 am. Murdo doesn't remember any of the crew's names.

At 7:40 Harrie says they have arrived back at the FE office and the mess house at Chatanika. The ride was bumpy through the tilling rides and they saw the bumps. They were pumping out water through the pond. They had unusual amounts of water and they couldn't get the dredge down so they had to pump the water. They had 5 pumps. One day big gale took the ice against the 5 pumps and turned them clean over. That's why you see the big pump coming off the dredge. Harrie says the pipe is about 2 feet in diameter. Now they are going back to McCrae's house.

At 8:40 of the recording Harrie says he is talking with Mr. Murdo McCrae and they have just had a wonderful lunch at the McCrae's. Judy is full of watermelon. Mr. McCrae is going to discuss things around Chatanika. The dredge started in July of 1928. Murdo was up there in 1927 in January. Murdo went to work for the FE Company then and he worked for two years for them. They moved outside then and they didn't come back until 1935. When he came back he went to work on the Davidson ditch on scrapper tunnel. Anna didn't come up until 1935 to Chatanika. Murdo says they had horses working on scrapper tunnel at Fox. The dredge has been going continuously since 1928. The dredge started in July of 1928. The dredge was laid up during the war. The current one is the same original. The dredge is 10 cubic feet. The method of dredging hasn't changed since the dredging started. There are 16 people on the crew including the dredge master. The number of crew has remained the same but before the war when the company was hydraulic they used to employ more men. The overburden of the ground had to be done to prepare the ground for dredging. This is called strip and towed. The ground was frozen so it had to be thawed. The dredging this year depends on when the water gets pumped down. They will probably get started on June 15th. The dredge will be running until late in the season, probably November. Murdo says they are trying to get down to about 35 or 36 feet.

At 14:20 of the recording Harrie asks if Murdo knows any funny stories. Murdo asks Harrie to turn off the recorder. When the recording returns Murdo is discussing the pumps that they use. Murdo says the pumps that they had they had them on a scale. When the ice started to melt the ice turned the scale upside down. They used to pump on the scale that you saw down on the [inaudible]. Now they have to pump off the dredge. There are two pumps going and another one out on a scow. There are two more down on the lower end. 5 pumps all together. The amount that the pumps pump isn't known by Murdo. Judy says that a man told her that the pumps pump 35,000 a minute and Murdo dismisses that estimate. He says maybe 12-15,000. Harrie interjects and asks Murdo what he thinks will replace the vanishing mining industry. Murdo says he doesn't think anything will replace the mining. He says the only thing he can think of is if the price of gold goes up then they will start mining again. Harrie asks about other minerals. Murdo says he doesn't think there is enough of the other ore for commercial purposes. Harrie suggests tungsten and iron and other ores. Murdo says the other things were never concentrated enough as the gold. Harrie says they can make 120 things out of coal. Murdo says coal is one thing because there is an abundance of it. Murdo says coal could possibly replace the gold mining. Harrie says he stops and thinks about in the early days they stampeded to the west and as economics changed it was no longer practical or economically possible unless they had enormous farms. In the early days it was the same way and then the big companies took over and now that is finished. What is going to replace it?" asks Harrie Hughes. Murdo says there is a lot of land that can be mined around Chatanika for gold. He says coal is the only thing that can be mined in the Fairbanks area.

At 18:53 of the recording Harrie mentions the big iron dyke over north of Nome. They hauled machinery all winter north of Nome. Murdo says there is tungsten all around but not enough for commercial purposes. Harrie asks Murdo if he thinks the geologists know that there is oil all in the area. Murdo says he supposes there is oil in the area. Murdo says they are the only people that can find that. Harrie says by the time the oil is dissipated he believes that there will be atomic energy and solar power. Murdo says he believes that. They both predict that oil will be made obsolete eventually. Harrie says solar power far exceeds tungsten. They are putting solar batteries on Sputnik. The batter is tiny. Harrie says he is pleased to come out and visit with Murdo. Harrie wants Murdo's consent to allow Harrie to play some of the recordings for the pioneers. Harrie says they have to use every means they can to preserve Alaskan history. Anna says they must preserve some of the machinery and some of the things that they have used in the past. She asks where the machines are going to be put in the future. She says there is a lot of old time history that is very valuable but where is it going to put? She says she has thousands of things to be given to the museum right now for future history. Harrie says there are a lot of good people and things available and you just have to find them. Harrie compares it to finding gold. There is millions of dollars of gold in the earth that will never develop. Judy asks how much gold they get during the summer and Murdo says he can't answer that question. Anna says it was wonderful that Harrie and Judy visited. She says they could write books and books about their experience. They wish Harrie the best of luck when he goes back east. Harrie signs off.

At 23:18 of the recording a new interview begins and the day is June 4th, 1963 in Fairbanks, Alaska. He is in the home of the Irving Reed's, old Nome pioneers from the early days. Irving McKenny Reed came to Nome in May, 1900. He came to the Aleutian Islands when he was 10 years old. Irving went to the first school that was ever established in Nome. He lived in Nome off and on for 24 years. Harrie says Irving is the only mining engineer left in Alaska and asks Mr. Reed how came to take up mining engineering. Mr Reed says he is into the only qualified mining engineer. He is the only qualified mineral surveyor for the BLM left in Alaska. Irving got married in 1923 in San Francisco. Irving says she came up in 1924 in the spring. They went to Nome and that fall went to Fairbanks. He had the contract to patent the mining claims of the Fairbanks exploration company which was a subsidiary of the U.S. Smelting Mining and Refining Company. Irving says he was the past president of the historical society when they started the Pioneer Park. He joined the pioneers in 1912 in Igloo 1. He rejoined in 1926 for igloo four in Fairbanks. The full name is the Tanana Yukon Historical Society. It was formed at about 1959. Harrie says it was formed 1958. Irving wasn't in the area when it was formed but he has spent the last year as the society's president. Irving believes they should have a building where the records can be stored and transcripts be made from them and also where the tremendous collection of photographs can be so people can see them. They have photographs that go back to the early days of Alaska and these are things that are priceless and can't be replaced. They are part of the history of Alaska and the United States. Irving was on the Alaska game commission for 13 years when Alaska was at territory from 1927-1940. For several years he was chairman of the commission. He would say that the interior of Alaska had the most game of any place in the world with the possible exception of east Africa. The species were as much as east Africa but the amount of animals is about equal.

At 28:30 of the recording Irving says that in certain roadhouses they gave permits for taking a certain number of caribou and moose to be sold as cooked meat. The Anvil Creek Railroad was the old arctic railroad and was a narrow gauge railroad that was built in 1900 from Nome to Anvil Creek. It was extended to Sheldon on the Cusi [?] River about 87 miles from Nome all narrow gauges. The intention had been to build it on to candle where there were coal mines on the Kuguk River, the idea was to ship supplies to the mines at candle and bring the trains loaded with coal back to the mining industry at Nome which was one of the greatest in the world at that time. They got to the Kusucheen [?] River and ran out of money. It was duth money. The federal government had a tax of \$100 a mile for a railroad. It didn't last very long. Ultimately the territory bought the railroad and kept it in shape for the miners to run out on with cars attached to a dog team. Irving says he used to have a car with the dogs. Irving says his dogs would make 9 miles an hour. Irving says all the engines were coal back then. They were originally from the elevated railroad in New York City. There was no wood in Nome to burn. Wood would have been much more expensive. Wood was almost in the class of gold.

At 31:50 of the recording Irving begins discussing gas driven locomotives. Irving says the gas driven locomotive was brought in by the road commission when they used the railroad to run their crews out. Everybody that could afford it had a little light gasoline engine on a hand car to run out. There were only two or three of them around town and they belonged to banker and some of the wealthy merchant. Harrie says when he got on the Alaska railroad they were using those little gas powered cars everywhere. Harrie says one company brought that railroad in Seward. Irving says that was the old Alaska northern but that was before Irving's time in this country, he never saw that. Irving says that was broke so the United States decided to run the railroad from Seward while they brought them out. Under the present economic setup Irving doesn't know if anything can be done about the mineral mining. The gold mining is defunct because of the depreciation of the dollar as the set price of the gold. The depreciation of the dollar has put wages so high that men can't hire people to work for their mining expeditions. Irving believes the northern part of the Seward Peninsular Nome coal mining isn't feasible. He saw a hundred feet of coal with the coal and he traced the seam for 5 miles when he was a territorial associate mining engineer. Irving says the coal was a low grade. It's very high grade lignite.

At 35:12 of the recording Harrie says he has been asked since there are large companies looking for investments, could they put plants in Alaska to develop by products? Irving says Alaska probably has the greatest undeveloped coal mines in the world but whether such a thing can be done is very doubtful just on account of the high wages and the depreciation of the dollar. There is very good coal semi-anthracite up at cap Lisbon but what are you going to do with it. They have attempted to develop that for the past 50 years that he knows of and haven't been able to do anything with it even though at that time there was more capital. Harrie asks Irving if he was on the coast of Homer when that coal was brought. Irving says he own property in Homer. Irving says that one of those things that petered out because it didn't pay to run the coal company when the steamships stopped burning coal. Irving says there is tremendous deposit in Homer and people go down in the fall to the beaches and gather their winter fuel supply. The coal is broken off and washed up by the waves. Irving says they don't know the extent of the coal all through that country. Harrie asks about the Chickaloon district and if Irving spent time there. Irving says he spent time there for a year in 21 or 22. Harrie says he worked down there just before the

past World War. Irving says there is a tremendous amount of coal and the navy was going to develop that. It's a very good steaming coal but the navy turned to burning oil. Harrie discusses the Healy mine. Irving says the Healy mine was developed before he came to Alaska. A fellow named McIntyre or Macintosh had a company before Cap got it but when Irving move to town Cap Lethrop had already started his mine there. He doesn't know the history of that he just knows the people involved.

At 38:50 of the recording Harrie asks Irving if he believes there should be any prospecting done or engineering surveying done to see the possibilities on the enormous supply of coal in Chickaloon. Irving says the state should look into that but people haven't taken an interest to it because it doesn't pay but someday it will. Irving says the state would be foolish but the state has done a lot of foolish things. Harrie says a lot of people are grabbing because Alaska is a new state. Irving says in the early days there was much more investment money. When Alaska first started there was no income tax so people had money to invest. All the money goes to Uncle Sam now the investment capital supply is rather low. If Alaska had become a state before the First World War there would be a much higher population. After Ballinger [?] had tied up all Alaskan coal and withdrawn it all, for many years any development of coal and oil was stopped. They loosened up on the oil in the 20s and after that they loosened up on coal. The mines were going into the hands of the big companies and the capital wasn't available to do what would have been done earlier if the federal government hadn't stopped development. Harrie asks Irving if he has any advice for people who wasn't to visit Alaska. Irving says Alaska has the most beautiful scenery in North America. The beauty of the Alaska Highway, the closer you get to Alaska the more beautiful it gets. Some of the roads like the road to Valdez. Irving says if they ever get the one to Cordova Alaska will really have something that is out of this world. Harrie says the people of Cordova frown on the road because of what happened to the rest of the state. Irving says some of those people are little too conservative but they have to give into progress no matter what happens. Harrie says this concludes the talk with Irving McKay Reed. Irving and his wife are sitting in the house. This is June 4th, 1963 in Fairbanks. The recording ends.