

Call number: 02-00-63

Irving McKinney Reed

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The recording starts with side two and begins with Irving McKenny Reed discussing going to military school in California for a year and finished his senior year of high school in Nome. He said by that time the town had built a nice wooden school similar to the one in Fairbanks. It was a two story building and had all the grades. He had no trouble getting into University of California from there. Mrs. Ford was in Nome but her name wasn't Ford then. Her name was Hilda Ford. She had a rooming house at the Sheldon hotel. Her name was Mrs. Sheldon at the time. A man asks in 1913 who was the first legislature under the act. Frank Wasky was the one but Irving thinks there was one before Wasky. Wasky was the most noted one. Alaska was a district then. When Wickersham went in at 1913 they made Alaska a territory. At that time Alaska thought they would be a state in a year or two. Irving thinks if Alaska became a state then then the whole history would be different. Alaska had the people and the money to develop the country. They never knew how many people were in Nome but they estimated between 20 and 30 thousand. At that time there were so many small mines and they didn't go into the big companies. The wealth was more evenly distributed and stayed in the country and not to other states. Mr. Reed talked about Ms. Ford and talked about her husband was shot there. Irving says when she ran the Sheldon Hotel she was a widow. Irving's wife was told some of the story but Irving doesn't think she remembers. He knew Ford pretty well but he never got to talk to her about her life. The man asks if he knows anything about Bill Arthur when he was married in Nome.

At 4:35 of the recording Irving discusses his father being a lawyer and how he knew the lawyers and the judges. His father was the commissioner and report there. His father was appointed by Wickersham. The man asks if the law enforcement was local by the townspeople. Irving says yes. He discusses a time in 1900 when he was in the crowd and saw soldiers with fixed bayonets going up to guard the jail. Irving didn't know what it was all about. All he could do is read the USGS reports. The man asks what the Eskimo population was in the Nome vicinity. Irving says the Eskimos worked around Nome and were from Cape Nome east of the Big Sand Spit. In 1900 they had a tremendous measles epidemic among the Eskimos. He walked from Nome to Solomon with Winecoof [?] who was an old mining engineer. There was about 20 miles between Cape Nome and Solomon. There was an Eskimo village but there wasn't a person there. The big storm of 1913 went over that. Those old Ina [?] is a snow house that isn't in Alaska. It is a semi-underground house. They are probably buried under the sand. Reed says they will dig it out someday. 20 miles it stretched.

At 8:18 of the recording Reed says he was 14 years old in 1903. Some fellas were coming down the coast to Nome from Teller. They stopped at Cape Wooly. There were old Eskimo houses. They picked up some tremendously rich gold ore at Cape Wooly. Irving got in on it because his father sent him with

old man Winecoop [?] and other men to see if they could spot where the gold was on the Tizook River [?]. The father said the formation was all wrong for gold ore and it must have been drafted in by ice. On Tizook river there's garnets. A man asks if the Indian were industrious and took part in white culture. Irving says they were uncivilized. They had their own culture which white men had to adopt to get along. In the interior peninsula white people adopted Eskimo houses. They were entirely different from American's. He says Eskimos are the only native people of North America who were able to hold onto their own culture and adopt the American culture alongside of it. The Eskimos are very smart people. Certain families are very smart. The man asks if there is any hard rock mining in the Nome area. Irving says they have tried but no luck. In Soloman they had the big raw mine which was the only quartz mine that ever paid in the whole area. There is still possibility of quartz. Tin was up farther north near the Seward Peninsula. They are still mining tin up there. There is asbestos from there as well. They have lead silver at the Olmanic [?] mine which old man green discovered in 1887. They were mining in council before they were mining in Nome. People were more adventurous in those days than they are now. As a boy he knew the characters in that. He knew old Judge Noyes and said hello to him and knew his wife. He went over and got some things for her. The man asks if there were any rumblings. Irving says he thinks the miners were more in sympathy than the people who were trying to take the claims away from the people of the original discovery. The sympathy of the Americans...[trails off]. A United States citizen couldn't stake claims. The only person who could take action against that was the United States government. Therefore no private individual could jump a foreigner's claim. The US government could throw them out if they wanted to but they didn't want to. Noyes was perfectly honest but also weak according to Reed. He was hoodwinked into some of the things that were done there.

At 16:08 of the recording a man says the clerk of the court was [inaudible]. Irving says the clerk's name was McKenzie. Irving says frost was the clerk of the court and McKenzie was the marshal. McKenzie was Rosenths [?] right hand man in South Dakota. He was a big political boss. Johnny McGinn was a district attorney at that time. Irving doesn't remember Johnny McGinn from Nome but he knew Johnny from Fairbanks. Irving left Nome in the fall of 1924. He had been to Fairbanks before. The interviewer says he came up in 1935 and he heard of Irving as a highway engineer in the territory. Irving says he thinks he got in by a fluke because he is not a politician [there is laughter]. He was elected but he doesn't know how it ever happened. That was in 1952 when he was elected. His father died on the bench in Juneau in June of 1928. He was judge to 1922 to 1928.

At 19:30 the man asks if he can tell the difference between an Eskimo and an Indian. He says yes there is a decided difference. The Eskimo is a certain shaped head, dolichocephalic [there is laughter]. Irving says the Eskimo was originally a white man and had "mognolized" by Mongol blood. The Eskimo started around Russia on the White Sea and worked westward. The Indian Athabascan is the relative of the Navajo and Apache and he has a brachycephalic skull with a short head and has entirely different build and speech. There is no relationship between the two but they made be mixed in places. There may be a connection between present central Asians and the Athabascans. A female asks if Mr. Reed if he is aware of an incident in Nome when two or three men tried to make miners buy license to mine. He said the beach was discovered by a soldier. The first comers into Nome had staked the whole country and people couldn't make a living. The discovery by the soldier of the beach diggings in the early 1900

relieved the pressure. They were holding miner's meetings and Reed read this. He was 10 or 11 at the time. They laid out the decision that no one could stake the beach. The beach was staked and they tried to keep the miners from working on it. Anybody could dig as far as they wanted to reach with their shovel. Some made about 20 dollars a day. The going wages was 5 dollars a day. That was the highest wages in the United States, 5 dollars a day. A man asks why Bering stuck the Aleutians when he could see the Seward Peninsula. Reid says he has Bancroft's "History of Alaska." Reid says Bering started at camp Chitina Peninsula and was so far south he didn't know anything about Eastgate. Bering started at Petrapadlos [Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky?]. The first thing he hit was the Aleutian Islands. Bering was interest in fur. Reid says if it was would have been different if it would have been an Englishman. After the Russians got started they were really adventurous. A female says they have coffee ready. Reid says he hopes he hasn't bored anybody. The recording skips and a female tells Reed they have been very happy to him and there is clapping.

At 26:30 of the recording Harry Hughes steps to the microphone and says that is the termination of Mr. Reed's talk at the Historical Society this evening on July the 27th, 1961. A new portion of the recording starts and Harry Hughes is saying that the person being interviewed is Irving K. Reid at Birch Park Recreation Hall. [This is part one of the recording]. He introduces himself as Irving McKenny Reed, born in Seattle. Came to Alaska via the Aleutian Island in May 1900. He's been doing 1962 years in Alaska. He says Harry Hughes and Andy Wickham asked him to talk about some of the mining in Alaska during the old days. He was a boy during the strike of the third beach in Nome which is an old beach mine now buried 50-100 feet on the ground. He says he ought to go back in the story to the first beginning of Nome. John Blake was one of the original discoverers of Nome by a group of prospectors from up the Snake River and just stumbled upon it. John Blake was a representative of the ATT Company. When they found Nome they didn't know what they had. They asked Blake, who was buying furs at the time, to come over and look at it. Blake recognized the place as a very important gold company. He told them not to stake the claims until he could get to St. Michael's and resign. He got into a mix-up at Gullivan [?] and news got out. They saved him a claim, number 8 above animal creek. Number 8 was the only claim throughout the whole stake that wasn't a real good gold producer. He got \$8,000 out of it. That was the start on Nome and that was 1898. By 1900 the rush was on and his father had a sulfur mine of Mt. McKushin on Unalaska Island. His father went back to Philadelphia in 1899 and formed a company. The millionaire that was backing the company came to check out the sulfur mine. This was before the Louisiana sulfur. At the time all the sulfur was coming from Sicily, Italy. The sulfur was quite valuable at that time. It was 98% pure. The millionaire went up there and died at Dutch Harbor from heart failure. The whole thing collapsed and Reed's mother went out and Reed and his father went up to Nome. His sister was left with his grandparents and then spent the winter in Nome. He knew about the gold mining when he was about 13. Most of the mining was right up on Anvil Creek.

At 31:50 of the recording Reed says they made in important discovery at bluff in 1900. That was probably the richest beach plasters ever discovered in the world. The man who made the discovery told Reed about it. The man had gotten other to stake the beach and the law came out that people can't claim land that belonged to the government. The men went back and dispossessed the original discoverers and decided they had to split it up. They laid from fingertip to fingertip and each man had

\$1500. It took him about 2 hours to dig it out. That was the main discovery. There was another discovery in 1902 at the head of Andrew creek called Nickola gulch. A man named Caribou Bill made a discovery up there and went \$100 a pan. When Reed was 13 he and Mrs. Noyes and some other woman including his mother went up there and the woman were digging in the bank of the Gulch where he had a cut and they were taking out little nuggets. Caribou Bill was too bashful to say something. JC Brown made the discovery on Little Creek. There was a man named Becard [?] in 1900 that drilled the tundra back in Nome. He was the one who thought there would be a discovery at the spots. Reid knew JC Brown very well. In 1903 when he made the discovery he told Reed about it. He sank the shaft down and hit a very rich ground. There had been so much jumping of mining claims that he didn't tell anybody about it. He got a friend to get a rocker and they rocked out \$50,000. He buried the money under his kitchen.

At 35:30 of the recording Reed says he took some notes about the extraordinary richness of the third beach which ran along the foot on Anvil Mountain. He was down when he was 16 on the Bessy Becnh which I son holy oak creek. About 2.5 or 3 feet off of the bedrock there was a streak about 2.5-3 inches wide and it was almost pure gold. They just ran the shovel and took out a pan of dirt. He panned out 19 ounces in that one pan. That was \$180 in that one pan. Reed and his father went out to see Frank Wasky and his claim. He made a million dollars or so. He had in the door of the cabin a 5lb large bucket full of gold, holding the door open. He said they didn't think anything of the gold. No one ever thought the gold was every anything extraordinary. The 3rd beach ran almost straight east to west up to newton gulch and his father had a claim with 2 or 3 associates. That was the only place the beach turned. He misses being a millionaire by one claim. Reed says he used to have the job of walking four miles into town with \$20,000 on his back to the bank. In the summer of 1911 reed worked in the pioneer mining company's pit. They had a hydraulic lift. They would clean up \$50,000 every 6 days. That was the place where they would make big rocks into little rocks. His partner was a big Egyptian. He was about 6'2.

At 39:45 of the recording Reed begins talking about a man named Macintosh who was up at Candle. That was a tough country. Macintosh had been setting up steam points on Candle Creek on the bench. All he had on were pants a jumper and rubber boots. When he got hoisted up he had to go from the mouth of the shaft to the boiler house where his partner was. Between that few feet he got lost. The wind picked him up and carried him clear across the river. He was lost in -50 degrees with the terrible wind. Macintosh lost part of his feet and just one part of his hand. He could walk but he could barely walk. He became a schoolteacher after that. Reed's own experience in mining was when he was a boy. He was too old to get in on the main rush. Nome at that time pushed about \$12 million a year. At one time Reed saw 19 dredges at Nome. Dredging doesn't keep the town up like the individual mining. The dredging companies would come in with all of their supplies and be gone. The town didn't benefit. He suggests that maybe Harry can ask some questions. Harry asks reed how people used to live in Nome. Reed says in the early days there was no electricity, they burned coal oil. They imported fuel from Vancouver Island. Those that could afford it got Chinese anthracite and it lasted a year. The Chinese anthracite was shipped from china. They didn't know about all the coal in Alaska. Reed was an associate mining engineer for a number of years in the Northern Seward Peninsula and they have tremendous amount of coal beds. The one bed was over 100 feet thick. It wasn't high grade coal but it

was coal. The railroad in Nome was intended to go to coal fields. That was put up in 1900 and put up by CD Lane who organized the Wild Goose Mining Company. They laid planks on the tundra and put the ties on top of them which was the very best way to do it. They put the rails out and ran it up 4 miles to banner stations and then to Dexter when plaster up extra creek was found. Then a Belgium outfit put up 2 million to continue this across Seward Peninsula across the coal fields up around Campbell. They got as far as Kusetrine [Kustatan?] River and that was about halfway. He was a rodman on that survey for that railroad. That was one of the epic railroading. They brought up the supplies... [a woman interjects and asks to stop so she can turn the tape over]. A man asks how the gold deposit got there. Harry Hughes says they have had a few minutes to change tapes and there has been a little bit of conversation going on and they will continue with the program.

At 45:51 of the recording Reed is discussing how he thought he would take the history of the Seward Peninsular railroad because it is of historical interest and he doesn't know anyone that has been in touched with it as much as he has. They had a tremendous lot of trouble getting the supplies out to the through the tundra. They took them out of the six horse team and sometimes they wouldn't get there. They got so far ahead when they were laying the tracks. A man says they did the same thing down in Fairbanks. Reed says he saw fellas who were big husky Swedes and they would lay down in the rain in puddles because the water was warmer than the rain. They were so exhausted they just had to sleep. Reed doesn't think anyone had seen that before. Reed says that was the first railroad to be established in the interior. It started in 1900 but in 1906 they continued it to Kuzakeen [?] River 90 miles. Skagway was started in 1898. Reed asks if the old railroad out of Seward was the first one. 1906 was Katella. Harry Hughes asks Reed to repeat the question because the recording device isn't set up to record the people in the back of the crowd. Reed says the question is that the Quite Pass Railroad was before the Nome one and that was true. He's not sure if the Seward was before Nome because he wasn't there. Katalla was done in 1906.

At 49:57 Reed says there was quite an era of railroad building. One of the things that held the railroads down in Alaska was the \$100 tax for a mile of railroad being built. When you get out to laying down 90 miles of road that was quite an item. They didn't last very long under those conditions because the money gave out. The Belgians wouldn't give up any money but if they had gone on and gone on to the coal mines then the railroad would have paid out. A man asks if they are still mining coal and Reed says no. When Reed was up there, there was one man hanging onto the mine. There is no more plaster mining to amount to anything. They use oil and the dredge that was there and so they quite mining the coal. They had to bring it in 20 miles on horse teams. A man in the crowd is discussing communication and the way Reed had to live back then. Reed says in 1900 there was no communication by telegraph at all to Nome. In 1902 they continued the telegraph down to St. Michaels and from there the longest radio in the world took it across to Port Safety and it was nearly 100 miles and from there the telegraph went into Nome. For letters it was about 2 months for the mail to get in via dog team. A man in the crowd says it take about four hours in Seattle right now. Reed says back then that was first class mail, they didn't get magazines and people used to cut out stories from magazine. Reed says he remembers as a young kid getting the first installment from a magazine and he never found out what happened to the first installment. Reed says there were people in Nome from all over the world. They had luxuries

brought over by boat. It was a rich community and they had everything you could think of. In 1900 they weren't prepared. Coal went up to \$150 a ton in 1900. In 1900 his mother was sick and his father was paying \$2 for fresh eggs. A man mentions Wickersham in his diary about a woman who got her start in San Francisco. She then married a millionaire who operated a gold company in Nome. The man doesn't remember what her name was and Reed says he doesn't know who she was. Wickersham wrote about her a couple months again in the News Miner. Reed says there was a hodgepodge of people. A man wants Reed to discuss the early day schools. Reed went to the first school in Nome on 3rd avenue. There were more kinds than thy thought. They evacuated the city hall and turned it into the school house. The school was much larger. They had two school teachers; Mrs. Mouse with red hair and Mrs. Young, who was tall and thin. Reed doesn't remember their first names. He thinks it was spelled Mouse. Both of those teachers gave a very thorough grounding in all of the basics. He went with Dolittle and Northfellow. The school was a town school. A woman asks about the churches. There was a congregation of Presbyterian and they also had Catholic and Episcopalian churches. Reed's parents were Episcopalians. The recording ends.