

**Call number 02-00-93**

**John Swaggler, Pioneers of Alaska "Mug-up" in Nenana**

**March 22<sup>nd</sup>, April 1<sup>st</sup>**

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**Series: Harrie Hughes Collection**

**Notes: Original on 7-inch reel, master copy on CD.**

It's March the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Harrie Hughes is going to tell what John Swaggler, an early day pioneer told him about a little incident at the Bering Sea. Swaggler has traveled the Interior of Alaska and met all the early day trappers and traders along the different rivers, in Koyukuk and over at the Bering Sea. At Bering Sea in 1921, he was on a trading schooner from Tacoma, Washington, that was owned by a wealthy man from Tacoma.

In years prior to 1921 there was a free travel between Siberia and Alaska. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 it took them a couple of years to put up the iron curtain. There was a Russian boat with some soldiers who attempted to take the boat. They pulled on shore at the trading post and the two Russian soldiers and some officers were going to confiscate the boat and send them back to Nome. Swaggler told that his crew of men got together and decided to trap the Russians on the boat and get them to sea. There was a storm coming and the Russians refused to let them move the boat. They got two soldiers with their rifles separated and the rest of the Johnny Swaggler's crew seized the soldiers. One they tied up and one they captured by surprise while he was reading his paper. The wind was getting pretty strong and one of Swaggler's men cut the anchor off the boat and the wind took them out to the sea. The Russian soldiers that they had on board they took to Nome from where they telegraphed Washington that they had two Russian soldiers in Nome. The secretary in Washington ordered the people who captured the soldiers to feed them and pay for their expenses. Johnny Swaggler made arrangements with a Russian cargo boat that was passing by to take the men but Swaggler had to pay them \$250 dollars to take the men back to Russia.

Swaggler told he never went to Klondike to buy fur because he didn't want to pay the license that was \$120 dollars in 1921. He went up to Fort Yukon and Eagle and Circle and the trappers who lived close to the border would sneak across from Canadian side with lots of fur.

Harrie tried to get Johnny to talk to tape but he didn't feel like it. He's almost 90 years old. [End of the segment.]

At 6:20 the recording resumes with quiet volume. Someone is talking about landing in Nenana. [Unclear discussion.] A woman's voice is talking about just visiting Dawson recently and says she lived up at Fortymile for 15 years. She has a husband who worked there, after which they moved into Caribou Creek where they lived for 4 years until her husband died. She came up [to Alaska] in 1919. She went to Anchorage and was there until 1926 after which she came to Fairbanks. Harrie Hughes says that Mary has a store at Nenana. She came to Nenana around 5 years ago. Harrie says she has Mr. James Jorgensen and George [unclear?] and Mary [unclear] and Mr. Crawford from the FE-Company, Earl Pilgrim and Jimmy McDonald. Andy Wicken is walking outside. They are in Nenana for the Pioneers Meeting at April 1<sup>st</sup>. Everybody is talking about the Nenana Ice Classic. Mary says it's hard to say when the breakup comes and she has put in her tickets. Harrie asks about the winter but Mary says she was Outside during the cold spell. She was in California. Harrie says she is letting Mary hear how she sounds. [Break in the recording.]

Another person comes on. He says he came with the Pioneer's Meeting and that he has a ticket to the Ice Classic. [Break in the recording.]

A woman's voice says it was cold during the winter. [Break in the recording.]

Harrie Hughes and Andy Wicken are looking at the tripod out on the ice. Jimmy McDonald is running around trying to get a picture. [Break in the recording.]

At 11:11 Harrie is talking with Johnny Nerland [Erland? Sp?] who says he was born in 6<sup>th</sup> of October in Hennes [Hemnes?] Norway. He came to Alaska in 1901 with a steamer that landed in Ketchikan. He worked in canneries all along the coast. He went to Dawson in 1906 and he mined at 13 Eldorado [Creek]. He worked for Anton Smithsroth [sp?] and then other one called Colny [Colney?sp?] who was an Englishman. Then he worked on the telephone line that was going alongside the railroad. After that he worked for the Guggenheim down in Dawson and then he built a line on Coal Creek on Canadian side. Then in 1911 he went to Iditarod. He

mined there for a while and worked then for the Guggenheims for 7 years. He was working at a powerhouse for 2 years as an operator. They had electricity there at the time and Harrie wants to know if it was AC or DC. Johnny says it was DC.

Harrie asks when he met Bill Burke and he says it was around 1918. Bill Burke was working as a mail carrier from Ruby to Iditarod. Harrie asks how Johnny got a bartending job. He says he tended a bar for Nils Glance in Iditarod. He tended bar off and on. There weren't any dance hall girls there but there were some in Dawson. Harrie wants to know if they were good looking and Johnny says they were all good looking. Then Johnny started working for the NC-Company in 1930 for the telephone. Harrie asks how old he was when he still was climbing poles, and Johnny says he was 69. Harrie helped him sometimes. Usually he worked alone but got no credit. Harrie asks about Johnny's trip to Nenana and he talks about the road conditions and fellows he drove down with. Then Harrie suggests that Johnny is getting a little bit tired and stops the recording. [Break in the recording.]

At 18:56 the recording resumes by Harrie wanting to interview Jack Paul who is not easily persuaded. He is 64, one year older than Harrie. Jack works as a cook in a restaurant. He's been cooking since 1920, in every place in Alaska. He was a camp cook in mines. Harrie asks if he remembers when Rodakite [Rodenkeit?sp?] was selling horse meat for moose meat in Nenana, but he says he doesn't. Some natives found a dead horse skinned out the hind quarters and brought them to Rodakite and he was selling them. Somebody turned him in to the game warden who found out it was horse meat instead of moose. [Break in the recording.]

[Unclear], president of the Igloo no. 17 of Nenana speaks to the recorder, telling about the mutual meeting with Igloo no. 4 and the Auxiliary of Fairbanks. They have beer and food for everybody. They have Adolph Stock, president of Igloo no. 4, John M. Jorgenson who is the president of the Grand Igloo and many other he doesn't know. Harrie says that two years ago he took a tape-recorder there and got over 100 people on it. [Break in the recording.]

Harrie is talking with the president of the Ice Pool. Harrie asks why they don't have the wire up and the president says it's too early since it's going to be a late breakup. Harrie says it looks mushy. [Break in the recording.]

It's April 1<sup>st</sup> at the Pioneer mug-up [Note: a mug up is old style slang for an informal gathering. Generally a person is invited in for a mug of something (coffee

or tea), some light refreshments, and gossip/news.], given by Igloo 17. Harrie asks Bill Burke when he first came into the country and he says it was 1907. Bill was in [unclear] when he came and he is an ex-soldier who was with the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He was stationed at St. Michael, after which he started carrying mail in 1910. He carried mail until the 1<sup>st</sup> World War when he went back to the Army and in 1922 he bought out and went back to the mail, carrying mail from Nenana to Flats which was 386 miles. [Break in the recording.]

Harrie says Bill carried mail, making one round trip per month from Nenana to Flats and Bill confirms. He says he carried mail for 19 winters. He carried it from St. Michael to Ruby, [unclear], Tanana. One winter he carried mail from Ruby to Ophir [Creek]. Bill was under a sub-contract. The NC-Company had the contract and Coghill [?] had it. Harrie asks if Bill ever got into really cold weather on the trail and if it was hard to man and the dogs. Bill tells that one Christmas day he left Louden and Indians had a flag on a pole and the flag "would stand right straight out." When he got to the end of his 30 miles, it was -66 below and it had been -60 in the morning when he started. "Them days" they [the mail carriers] just had to go, no matter if it rains or shines. They delivered mail once a week during the breakup as well as during the freeze-up. When the ice was running on the Yukon, they delivered mail just the same.

Once Bill wasn't running mail but was with somebody on the mail run. They put a boat on the ice with a tent and wood and drifted down the river, after which they mushed up the Bishop Mountain. [Unclear.] They didn't have much mail, maybe 30 lb. Bill was born in Springfield, Illinois in 1887. He got married about 1913. Harrie asks him to name his family members, children and grandchildren. Bill says he's got 17 grandchildren and 6 children alive. Harrie thanks for the interview and talks about the Nenana mug-up. [Break in the recording.]

29:11 Harrie tells again where they are and why, and says he is going to talk with George Hupprich of Nenana. George came to Alaska in 1911 and he was born in Portland, Oregon in 1897. When he first come to Alaska, he came with his father to Whitehorse. His father was a ship engineer on a government boat named General Jacobs. George joined the survey crew that surveyed the Railroad in 1915. The following year he went to work for Ladds' [Field?] on an engineering commission. He worked in a warehouse for 7 years and then went to work for the NC-Company [unclear] in Nenana and has been in Nenana ever since. Harrie asks about George's children and he says he has 3 boys and 2 girls. Boys are all located at Fairbanks and the girls too.

Harrie says that George used to play ball in Nenana for many years. They were organized in 1916 first as the Nenana Ball Team. Harrie asks him to name a few old-timers who played with him. There was: Blakey [sp?], Crouse [sp?], Backtaylor [Blacktaylor, Blacktailor?sp?], Harold Anderson, George himself, Markell, Tom Haines and a quite a few others. [Charles] Tibbet was an umpire. Harrie asks George to tell something about old-timers in Nenana. George says they just sat and drank home brew, so Harrie clarifies by asking about dog races. George says Bill Burke is still alive of the old mail carriers and Harry asks about Al Linder [?] who had the pretty, white Siberians [huskies]. George says they were Mike Kooney's dogs. He thinks that there is too much airplane travel these days; earlier people needed dogs to go places.

Harrie asks when people in Nenana got electricity and oil and George tells it was in 1960. The railroad had their own powerhouse in Nenana and they supplied the town. Harrie asks if George remembers the hobos who came to Nenana and had trouble with lines freezing up. They had a bleeder line that could be turned on with a little wrench. Harrie says he has some of the pipe from the old water system. Talking about Harrie's prospecting equipment. Discussing George's children and 10 grandchildren briefly, after which Harrie thanks for their catching up and closes the interview.

[Unclear talking. Snippets of discussion.]

At 36:47 Harrie reports that their muddy trip is over and discusses the weather and the people whom he gave a ride. [End of the recording.]