

Visit with Don Herning, 22 January 2001. *Participating are Colleen Herning-Wicken, Al and Bruth George. In front of us is a copy of a 1953 Fairbanks School District map which shows ownership of property at that time. Don still lives on his property at 5 M Chena Hot Springs Rd. All mileages given are for Chena Hot Springs Rd. unless otherwise noted.*

C: So what did you know about Bernard O'Leary? (near 8 mile CHS Rd.)

D: Oh, he was from an old time Alaska family, he was out here before anybody. He was married to Nels Jackson's daughter. His house in town was just across from Sentry Hardware. Independent Carpenters of Alaska is in one of his buildings. Carl Lindstrand and Adolph Sherrer were out here when I came out. Also Nels Jackson.

B: When did Brockmans (Henry and Tilly) come out?

D: Tilly had been married to Earl Stanford.¹ The Brockman's were out here about the time the war ended, in '47 or '46 possibly. They had that chicken farm. They put chicken wire with hay on it up in the ceiling for insulation. They didn't have electricity yet and were using gas lanterns for light and that's what burned down their chicken business.

Tilly's first husband was Earl Stanford. He had 160 acres adjoining *(to the east) Harold (Herning's) eighty acre parcel and he sold his land to Harold.*

Do you remember old man Betschart? There was no road down George Rd., just a trail through the woods. We used to walk over there bird hunting. He had a lot of shrubs and plants and grains he was experimenting with. His place was on *(the present) Nordale Rd. where Severns' Rd....(comes in now).* He gave Carl *(Herning)* some Siberian wheat and he had good luck with it. That's when Carl bought his threshing machine..... Betschart was from Switzerland, I think.

B: Did he die out here, or he went to town...? What happened?

D: I never did know. I think he died while he was out here..... He was a real nice old man.²

C: Remember Harry Denton ? (below CHS Rd. on Steele Creek)

D: His homestead was way out here someplace ten or eleven miles out. He lived in a cabin out there and then he got this 5 acre piece on the west side of Steele Creek. He gave it to the University. Carl talked him into it. When he left Alaska, he loaded up his old truck with a big box on the back and went out to Montana, I think. Carl got a letter from him and he had made it out but had run off the road and into a river. He got out and swam ashore but that's the last of he saw of his pickup and black dog.

C: What do you remember about him? I remember he was kind of a scary guy.

¹ Tilly divorced Stanford in 1941, married Henry Brockman 1943.

² Frank Betschart died at St. Joseph's Hospital in 1949.

D: He killed a fellow that was in bed with his wife. Harold (*Herning*) stopped one time to give Harry a load of kindling for his stove. It was kind of dark and as Harold walked up to the house, something poked him in the back and there Harry Denton was, with a gun.

C: *Wasn't he kind of blind? Didn't you tell me he couldn't see very well?*

D: Yeah, he was getting pretty blind, I think. He went by sound, I guess. Anyway, Everett Lindstrand, when the creek was flooding one time, was coming home from work. He got across the creek somehow and old Harry Denton started shooting up there into the brush, shooting at Everett and, boy, Everett just ran.

Carl Lindstrand (*Everett's older brother*) was the one they called the Swede. He had filed on 160 acres and served in the army for a couple years. Carl's cabin was on his last (*easternmost*) forty and he gave Everett the forty acres on the north side of the Hot Springs Rd.³

Everett built a log house on his forty acres. He had two girls. His wife, Mary, died of cancer. Then Carl got Parkinson's disease and Everett decided that Carl should move in with him so he went down and burned Carl's cabin. Poor Carl was really broken up about this and didn't live too much longer after that. Then Henry Gettinger bought Everett's forty acres for a song and Everett took his daughter and moved out to the states.⁴

Floyd Hagaman was located up the road named after him, off Old Chena Hot Springs Rd. He used to work in the carpenter shop at Ladd Field and they told about his walking all the way to work over Birch hill.

Bob Straight came out here right after the war ended, in '47, I think. I always remember him with his long-barreled revolver. He always had it strapped on his waist and that long barrel almost reached his knee.

Then there was Adolph Sherrer whose cabin was right across the road from Bob 's homestead (*7 M*). He brought my mother some of his bread or rolls for he had been a camp baker. My mother asked if she could get his recipe but when she got it she was flabbergasted. The recipe called for something like ten pounds of flour, 1/2 cup of salt, a cup of shortening, 1 cup of dry yeast and a quart of warm water.

Joe Kruger's homestead joined mine on the east side. He lived in a one-room log cabin with a forty-foot greenhouse closer to the road. He decided he was going to raise tomatoes and vegetables and sell them all winter. He heated the greenhouse with coal so he cut wood all winter and took it to town and sold it and would buy a ton of coal for his greenhouse. That lasted about one winter, but he sure knew how to raise the best radishes I ever saw.

He was a kind of a moocher. Carl (*Herning*) had a barrel of kerosene and it kept going down and down and once in awhile Kruger'd come by and say, "I'd like to buy a gallon of kerosene."

³ Three of Carl Lindstrand's forties were on the south side of CHS Rd., the fourth on the north side.

⁴ The older daughter, Martha, had married.

Carl never did tell him, "Well, you've already had forty gallons." He would always come up to our place about mealtime when we lived in the old cabin and Colleen was just a little kid then and she'd go up and look up at him and put her hand on his knee and he'd just push her away. He was a shoo-fly pie and apple pan dowdy man. The last we heard, he sold out and went to Hawaii. A couple of the kids and I went up there after he left. His house was vacant and the door was standing open, and he'd been cooking on this little two-burner campstove and, boy, the grease in the bottom of that stove was about that thick.

There was several characters out here. I was one of 'em.

B: So when did you homestead out here?

D: I homesteaded in 1943. They drafted me when I was nineteen and I was out at Ladd Field. Bob Bartlett got a rule through that if you were old enough to go in the army, you didn't have to wait until you were 21 (*to file on a homestead*) so I ran right down and filed. I didn't have to do anything with it until I got out of the army. And then after I got out of the army, he got another rule through that said all I had to do was live on it seven months. Before that you had to clear 20 acres.....

C: So you didn't even have to clear any acreage?

D: No, but I went ahead and cleared more than that. I cleared about 30, I guess, altogether.

B: When did Carl homestead then?

D: He didn't homestead until he got out of the army in '46.

C: Were you the first of all the (Herning) boys to homestead?

D: Oh, yeah.

B: What about Walter (Eberhardt)? When did he come out?

D: He came out after the war, too, about the time Carl did. I was always sorry they did away with that homestead law, for these young kids, you know. They need something to work for..... Lynn Funk was the one who told me about this area. He homesteaded over where Brices are now (*on Steele Creek Rd.*) and he said, "You ought to go out there and get a homestead." He told me how to get there and everything, so I went to his place, then I hiked across the creek and out that ridge where our homestead is. That was open. The only person that was out there before that was old man Bennet and Dr. Fitz over there (*on Steele Creek Rd.*)..... Fitz was a Presbyterian minister. He'd been over in China as a missionary and he was already in full swing when I came out. Henry Gettinger owns most of that land now.

C: How old were you when Funk told you about homesteading?

D: I was 18. (When Funks were still at Brices) Neva Funk started the Steele Creek Bakery and all the bachelors in the neighborhood would buy bread and other goodies from her. When she became unhappy out here, Lynn sold his homestead and went outside. He sold his homestead

to a minister named Johnson who started a childrens' home called Maranatha. I think Johnson was a Baptist minister.

Funks came back to Alaska and bought Dr. James Lundquist's land across the road from us. They lived in a quonset house and when it burned down, Lynn bulldozed a road (now Funk road) to the back of their land and built a big log house. This also burned down later. They subdivided and sold most of the land.

B: Did you know Frank Fassler?

D: I remember almost what he looked like. He was kind of a slender, little guy. A real nice fellow.

B: Was he the one that was somewhat crippled?

D: It seems to my memory he was hunchbacked.

C: Do you remember anything about what he did?

D: I remember Harold knew him pretty good, Harold had a way of getting around. He hired Frank from time to time to work for him.

That was kind of fun when they started building this road out here. Henry Brockman had put some logs across Steele Creek so you could drive across it. It was just through the swamp up there, only part of the year you could ever drive it..... The road kinda went up to the top of the hill where Kruger was, just a dirt road. First they went down to Steele creek from the Pentacostal Children's home.

C: The road department did?

D: Yeah, the Alaska Road Commission. Boy that was nice. Then they extended it to the bottom of Kruger's hill there.⁵ There went another year. It took a year or so in between each time *(to build a total of about a mile of road)*.

B: Do you know about when that was?

D: That was about '49, I guess.

B: Didn't people come out by way of Steele Creek first?

D: Yeah, that's the way we all came out and everybody hated that hill goin' up there, from the Steese.

B: So at the time this extension from the Childrens' home (to the east) happened, was Chena Hot Springs Rd, from the Steese, in existence?

⁵ Kruger's property was on Five Mile Hill.

D: No, we came that way (*via Steele Creek Rd.*) for years. Then the army built that Nike⁶ site over there (*near 3 mile CHS Rd.*) and they extended the road (*from 4 M old Steese*) over to the Nike site. Then this road (*east, starting at 4 M CHS Rd.*) already went on over Kruger's hill and started down that other way (*toward the present Nordale Rd.*). We just followed that road out till it got to the Chena River, then we followed it all the way out—fishing, you know.

C: *So every summer they were putting a little more onto it?*

D: It seemed awful slow.....

A: *There was an older trail there and it was improved?*

D: No. It was an old wood road. And winter trail in certain places.

A: *That's what I thought. They didn't have to create a new right-of-way. They just followed the old trail.*

D: No, they didn't actually go for a right-of-way until they started improving it, then they come by and wanted to extend it to 100'. It was 66' because it was on a township line. I was glad to sign because I wanted the road but they took six acres and only gave me \$70 for it. I never did argue with it because I was so glad.....

Dorothy⁷ used to come down the hill there with three or four little kids going into town to wash. We didn't have a well yet, you know. She'd slip and fall in the mud and she'd just sit down and cry right in the middle of that muddy road.

C: *Was that in our driveway, our road up the hill?*

D: Yeah, up the hill to our cabin.....

Steele Creek Rd. didn't go into Hagelbarger, (*like it does now*)..... You can still see the old road wandering up the hill (*from the Steese Expressway, past the fire station*). It just went up almost straight. Ralph Adcock, he homesteaded over there by Fitz, in fact he married the Fitz girl.... Anyway, Adcock use to say, "I wish I had an atomic bomb and I'd blast that hill away so you could get up it....." Every day you had to stop and put on your chains to get up it.

C: *You mean, if you came up to Steele Creek (Rd.) now, you'd come out at...*

D: Hagelbarger. Before, it used to turn and go up that road where the fire station is.....

(*back to the map*)

C: *Was George Fry's land (on ESRO Rd.) what Louie Burdon ended up with?*

D: Well, he (*Burdon*) just took the lower part, he didn't take that top of the hill..... where the little dug-out cabin and the big quartz boulder was.

⁶ Not really a Nike site. It was an anti-aircraft battery.

⁷ Dorothy Springbett Herning died in 1982.

C: Fry dug into the side of the hill?

D: Uh huh, with just brush and logs across it. He was a young GI but he didn't stay long.

C: Then he must have sold to Louie Burdon.

D: Yes....

C: Because Louie Burdon was bordering your northern edge.

D: His probably comes out right down to here. And Charles Reidel (*actually Mrs. Reidel*), filed on that piece my mother filed on and relinquished. Where the spring comes out here. Joe Kruger owed Carl a bunch of money, so Joe sold Mrs. Reidel the forty acre piece here for \$1000.

C: Well, what do you remember about when Eleanor Reidel was around?

D: Her maiden name, when she filed was Eleanor Cunningham. Well, they didn't have a right-of-way through there, because it was not a section line or anything and so I gave Reidel's permission to use this line right here⁸..... I gave them 30 feet all the way up this side and they built their house, right here, I guess. Anyway, Joe Kruger owed Carl some money so Carl took 40 acres of Kruger's and sold it to Charlie Reidel for \$1000 and they built on that 40 acres. She gave her homestead to the bird society (*in her will*).

C: What about when she first filed on it, though, she was a soldier, right?

D: Yeah, she was at Ladd Field out there and she went out and bought one of those jeeps right after the war. She came to me and said, "Your name's right up in the ceiling of this jeep." It was one of those "Follow Me" jeeps. I used to go out and wave the airplanes in. I'd have a blinking light, you know, and I was waiting for a plane one day and I reached up and wrote my name.

C: So she didn't have to do any proving up, either?

D: No she was under the GI's... She built that little shack over there and that was it. She never cleared any land or anything. But anyway, I'd rented that piece from the state, \$16 a year to lease that 40 acres because that's where I had a wood permit to build a cabin.... I never did use it

C: Oh, you could have logged it all?.....

D: No, just for cabin logs. I asked her if she'd give me an easement along her west line to that 40 acres... and she wouldn't do it. "No, no, I don't want anybody over there at all.....".

⁸ The current Rifle Rd which was Don's east line.

Bob Gamble homesteaded up where ESRO road is now. He came to me for an easement for a road as his was a landlocked piece. He'd filed on it so I gave him an easement. I think it was thirty feet along my west line. A couple years later he came to the house and asked me to give him an easement for his road which he had built (ESRO Rd.). I said, "I gave you one already." "It burned up when my trailer burned," and I said, "Didn't you have it recorded?" He said no, so I wrote him another easement. That was thirty feet by a half mile on the east and west side of my homestead.

Section line - 4 acres
Riedels got - 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres
Gamble got - 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres
14 acres

(back to the map) When the army came out there and built that road to their site, that was a mess. They had these great big trailer-mounted guns, you know, big guns, holes in 'em that big around. Those big old trucks would go up the hill there by Weller School and they'd get off the road and they were always in the ditch.⁹ They were up there for several years, I guess, then they pulled out. Henry Gettinger bought it later.....

B: Here's John Holmes' (now Henry Gettinger's). PLO is what? Public Land... Office?

A: PLO? Public Land Order. It was reserved (by the government) for somebody.

B: Well, isn't that about where that gun site would be?

D: Yes, it was.

C: When it was active did you have any...?

D: Oh, they'd have firings and stuff over there..... You know, somebody came and wanted to buy that land from Gettinger and put a golf course in there, but the ones who offered to buy it wanted him to give them a some kind of a paper showing they weren't responsible if something blew up over there. He couldn't do that.

B: So that's why it fell through!..... You know any of these other people—Tilford England, Ernest Johnson...?

D: George Love. He was up there where the Childrens' Home (Pentacostal Children's Home) was. There was a helicopter crashed in the yard there and two fellows died in the fire. Love and Yoder were at the end of Love Rd.... Edmund Davis, he was right over there too, going clear down to where the creek was. (Steele Creek)

C: What do you remember about Pete Aiken?

D: Well, Harold was always hiring him. When I was out at the base, they made me a foreman for construction, (and) he was on my crew.

⁹ That hill was steeper, then, was not cut down until 1965-66, and again in the late 1990's.

C: *When you were in the army?*

D: No, no, after that. (*Don was a civilian employee on Fort Wainright for some years.*) He came to work out there.

C: *What do you remember about when he first came and homesteaded? Were there any feelings about him being in the neighborhood?*¹⁰

D: No, no, they didn't care. He was just another nice guy. We all liked Pete.

C: *So, what did you know about Charles Kivehlen?*

D: I just knew that he lived there, that's right down there in the swamp on the north side of CHS Rd. across from where Douglas¹¹ lived. On Columbia Creek.

B: *I always heard they had an artesian well on that place.*

D: Well, you know, over on this army site, when I took the kids and we were exploring around over there, we came to a pipe sticking up out of the ground and the water just coming out..... There was about a six-inch pipe.....

(*returning to the map*) Charles Fabian lived over there on Bennett Rd. And George Farkas....

B: *Farkas had potato fields in there early on, as I remember, but the area's all grown up now, used to be fields.....*

D: Just like my fields. You wouldn't know they were there. And then (*going back to the map*), Berman Rinear, he had that Rainbow Valley Ranch. He always came out to visit us, every time he come up, and the last time he come out, he was in pretty bad shape.... And anyway I gave him a big picture I'd taken of Mt McKinley and he was thrilled with that. He went back to California with it. And then he called me up one time just a couple years ago and he died since then. His daughter¹² works for Sourdough Express in the office.

C: *What do you remember about him when he was living here?*

D: He was in the army with me and on the Alert Crew.

C: *What's the Alert Crew?*

D: That's when we had all these planes come in to go to Russia. We had to meet them and direct them in to park.

¹⁰ The Aikens were the only black family in the neighborhood.

¹¹ Max Douglas, Henry Gettinger's father-in-law, settled where the test site is. The remains of his place are still there.

¹² There are two Rinear daughters, Debi and Cynthia. Cynthia wrote the article.

B: Was he here before the war or did the army bring him up?

D: He was here before the war, I think. He worked with my mother at the grocery store in the Rose Building that was demolished a year or so ago.¹³

B: There must have been a pretty small population in the Fairbanks area before the War.

D: I think when I first came to Fairbanks with Bill Lavery, there was about 3800 population. You look up here now and there are all these lights along here.... I remember you'd never see a light *(on the hills.)*

(We shift from the school district map to aerial photos of Fairbanks in 1949 and 1999.)

D: That must be Ladd Field. Here's the old airport. I use to hear the sandhill cranes_____, there was nothin' out there. Now this is all South Fairbanks.

C: When you were working for Pan American, was it at Weeks Field that they'd land the planes? Oh, man, look at that little short strip!

D: Yes, DC3s and DC4s. Well, it was quite a long strip at that time. They used to send me out when it was real foggy and I'd take the little tug and put these flares every so far along the edge so when the planes came in they could see where the airport was.

C: So when you worked at Pan Am you were in charge of doing things out on the runway?

D: Well, I'd pull the planes out of the hangar and gas 'em up and when a plane came in I'd clean it. We had a couple girls working there. One of them was Elsie Bergman. She and her sister wrote a book that's called "Born on Snowshoes" or something like that.

B: Was that a native family?

D: No, she was like a little German girl but I think her dad married a native or something. They lived out in the boonies.

B: This was when they were just building the airport we have now, right?

D: We used to take this old trail down here and hunt birds..... The university was hardly anything out there..... That big old wooden building was still there.

B: Old Main?

D: The Bunnell Bldg is the new one. I worked on that They had a tunnel under the hill there and the mining class used to go under there and dig in the rock.....

C: It's a utilidor now. They run pipes and things in it..... So you were in boot camp at the University.....?

¹³ The Rose Building was between Illinois St. and the News-Miner building.

D: Yeah, we stayed in Harriet Hess Hall..... The army had its own cook and everything there. There was only about six or eight girls goin' to college when we were there..... We did all the KP and kitchen work.....

C: What kind of maneuvers did they have you doing at the University?

D: Just a little training.(Old Main) was empty then. When I got into the infantry out there at Ladd Field, they took us out there to help clean the thing out. They was getting ready to demolish it.....

C: Did you find anything interesting?

D: The guys found some of that alcohol, pure grain alcohol..... (*Looking at Terrence Cole's "The Cornerstone on College Hill"*) We sure have lived in interesting times.

End of interview

Transcribed and edited by Bruth George

I agree to share this information with fellow interviewees and others interested in local history.

name

date