

Interviewing Bob Straight,
January 9, 2011 at 512 Herning Rd. Fairbanks, Alaska.

On the table lies a 1953 Fairbanks School District map showing land ownership. Bob's property is located above and below Chena Hot Springs Rd. near 8 Mile. An earlier interview with Bob on Dec. 8, 2010 produced only a few items of interest thanks to faulty tapes. These are included as noted.

B: Here we are again, interviewing Bob Straight. Colleen Herning and Bruth George are the other two people. It's January 9th, 2011.

Bob: We made it another year, right?

B: I wanted to ask you when you located on your land.

Bob: Well, I located on it first—just that cabin that was down there, before I actually filed on it, I believe that was in '48. Or late '47, don't remember which. Then I illegally used a Weasel to come out here all the time. That was the old winter trail. After I went out on discharge in 1951, I got back and my cabin was still there. Nobody'd filed on it so I filed on it in '51. It only took me ten months and it was mine. I was a disabled veteran so you didn't even have to build anything. Or clear anything at all. I did though. I had my cabin and way over my twenty acres cleared.

B: What was your total? 160?

Bob: 160, and later on I bought the Kimmel place. I bought 80 acres off of that. I farmed. Had my tractor, took my John Deere over to--

C: Carl's?

Bob: Wasn't Carl so much, it was Walt's—yeah, the Herning Rd. area. My John Deere would outwork any of the other tractors.

C: For plowing the fields?

Bob: No, I was using that to run the separator, separating grain. Charley Ward got me into that. I never got paid by anybody for that. When Charley borrowed my tractor, who knows where it went. He broke the yoke on the front axel one time and drove it over and said, "Bob, you gotta get your tractor fixed."

B: Speaking of Charley Ward reminds me, I wanted to ask you, starting at your place and working toward town, who were your neighbors, in order? Who was your closest neighbor on the town side?

Bob: *(looking at a 1953 School District Map)* Sherrer, Adolph Sherrer. There where Day's house was later. Then around the corner—used to be a square corner there--

B: Oh, Coby Eberhardt, was he there then?

Bob: Don't think so. Then the old road used to go around this side and, of course, Bob McQuinn was there.

B: Was Bohnet still there?

Bob: Oh, Dusty? Oh yeah. All those--

B: Earl Herning? Brockmans? Carl Lindstrand?

Bob: And Everett *(Lindstrand)*. *(looking at the map, east of Straight's property)* Here's Metcalfe. He filed but never did anything on the property. That's where Kimmel's got theirs.

C: They filed on it when he let it go?

Bob: Yeah. Then, of course, Nels Jackson was there. Nels was still cuttin' firewood. Ackerman was cuttin' wood. Bernard O'Leary was still cuttin' firewood. They never cut firewood on their places. Cut everything over on mine. 'Course that made clearin' easy.

B: How were they getting that wood to town?

Bob: The old winter trail. Later on old Sherrer had a D-2 cat. Oh, even after the Chena Hot Springs Rd. was put in he used to take it right over here by the *(Clay St.)* cemetery.

C: That would be this trail right here? The old sled trail?

Bob: Yeah, which no longer exists, not a legal trail anymore. It was an R4277 but they moved it, the Federal Government moved it.

B: So what became Chena Hot Springs Rd. replaced it?

Bob: Right. Then of course, all those railroads guys were up on Bennett—Farkas—all those guys were railroad guys. Bennett Rd. wasn't even built then

Colleen: Here's where Bennett was 'cause here's Fabian's.

Bob: I don't know how they got in here.

B: I think it was a matter of someone building to his place, then the next settler adds on to get to his. When you came out, how much of the Hot Springs Rd. was in place?

Bob: *(looking at the map)* This *(coming off the Steese)* was built, then they made the Hagaman cutoff.

B: When was it finally pushed through? It was in place in '58 but hadn't been for too long, I think.

Bob: Yeah, that's about right.... The old guy that lived down by the creek? Denton? He came out that one time and got stuck and just pioneered through. He was gonna do the short cut and got stuck. I had the Weasel out there and pulled him through.

C: When did that bridge get put across Steele Creek?

Bob: That got built right about that time. They just had planks down, it wasn't really a bridge. Earlier, they just had that pioneer trail. That's all we had.

B: We've heard stories about Tillie hauling eggs over by tractor to the end of Steele Creek Rd. *(at about 4 mile)* where they had to leave their car.

Bob: During the winter they had to use the old winter trail. Then their chicken house burned down....

B: When was that?

Bob: While I had the cabin but before I filed. I was totally military. '47 or '48.

B: Did they have chickens after that?

Bob: That finished it.

C: Did you have any livestock?

Bob: All I had was horses.

C: How many did you have?

Bob: I had two and I was taking care of two others.

C: Were you using them for transportation?

Bob: No, just for fun. I had a family living with me at the time and the kids wanted horses. Old Nick, he was an old huntin' horse from over on the highway, the Denali. He was twenty-five when I got him and I kept him till he was twenty-eight when he died of a heart attack. I had him and I had Spider, a little Shetland cross.

C: You had a horse named Spider?

Bob: Yeah. I got it from, what was her name, over on Farmer's Loop. Not Wilde. Remember where the transmitter site was, in the field over there?

B: Where the old barn still is?

Bob: Right across the road from that.

C: Did you use the horses for hunting?

Bob: Yeah, oh yeah. Spider was the nearest thing to a bird dog you ever saw in your life. She'd just lay down on her withers and go into the brush just like a moose. When she'd see a moose she'd go on point!

C: Did you hunt around your area?

Bob: Yeah. There was a natural lick down there. Right down by the trail. Right about here (*looking at the map*). Black mud.

C: They like that?

Bob: They eat that. I finally got smart. Got a building set up down there now, with a couch and a TV and a big 4x4 picture window and a hole about this big through the wall.

C: That's where you still do your hunting, huh?

Bob: You bet. I'd get the tractor and drag 'em up to the overhead hoist. I finally got smart, took me 15-18 years to learn to stay home, you got the same thing without running all over the country. Oh, I got that runway down there and it's just 100 yards from the front of the house over to the lake, so for 100 yards it's cold turkey.

B: What runway was this?

Bob: My runway, half mile long.

B: Did you build it?

C: Going east-west?

Bob: Yeah.

B: Who uses it?

Bob: What's his name? Part of the winter he flies off of there, quite a bit, he also flies off of International. Um, Ken Jouppi. His airplane company is Finn Air. He's got a 206 and a 185 and a 180... And then what's his name, the kid that got busted for hauling booze and stuff into the native villages and lost his airplane. He got another airplane. It's sitting down there. He flies off there now he's out of jail. I did think that was kinda silly on his part, knowin' what the penalty is.

C: Do you have an airplane, too?

Bob: No. I got an airplane with another guy. Got discharged, went out in April '51. International wasn't there. We took off from the Base. They flew me out to Great Falls and discharged me there. Then I went home from April till December.

C: To Kansas?

Bob: Yeah. Then I worked for Boeing on the beginning of the B 47 program. They gave me a department, then I quit and came back to Ladd.

C: Your work up here was doing a variety of things, right?

Bob: Oh, a whole bunch of things, yeah.

B: Mostly involving machinery of one kind and another?

Bob: Machinery or fire fighting. First fire chief at the University. I think it was Fire Marshal, then when they started the fire department they made me the chief.

B: And when was that?

Bob: That may have been '52, yeah, it had to be '52 because I didn't enter college until a year after I got up here.

B: So you were going to school and being fire marshal at the same time.

Bob: Yeah, because I had fire experience, keeping all the extinguishers straightened out and all the emergency hoses in the buildings, kept them folded up. Periodically, they had water fights and I had to take them all out and dry them out and hang 'em back up. And then we got the jeep and, actually, the people in the valley got that started so, of course, that was a combined fire department then.

Then Chaddon, C.O. Chaddon— (did what??)

Incidentally, he invented the first auto-start--two types. They were a pretty good sized box. He had that patent. I don't know whether that hung over to the solid state versions or not. He, and who else was there? I knew them from church so when this fire department deal came up, and I was campus fire marshal, they elected me. We didn't have the money to pay off the fire truck and I went up to see Doc Bunnell and he, personally, came up with the rest of the money!

Second World War, when the guys went out, a lot of them transferred their land over to him because they might not come back and he paid them so they had some money while they were in the service. Then they were able to buy it back if they wanted to after the war. But a lot of them didn't and he ended up with a whole lot of land, all over the place.

C: Is that what became more of the university?

Bob: Some of it down at the far end. But most of it was down in the flats, you know, "Vulture Flats." That's what they called the (*College*) community, "Vulture Flats." (*laughing*) Chena Ridge was "Vulture Hill." (*more laughs*)

C: You were living on your homestead when you were working at the University?

Bob: Well, I was in and out of here. I had to stay on campus quite a bit. At the old Vet's Dorm.

C: Did you know Eleanor Riedel? She homesteaded next to Dad and she was in the Army and got her homestead the same way you did so you didn't really have to clear the land or anything.

Bob: Yeah, I did some of her work for her. She died not very long ago. The funny thing was, over here (*on the map*) straight south of me—the Tonseth homestead. Einar Tonseth offered to sell that to me, it was right straight down the township line, for thirty-five hundred bucks, and that was a 320 acre homestead. I didn't have the money to pay for it. He called me up and said, "Bob, do you still want that land?" I said, Oh, yeah." Einar: "I got a buyer that's offered 45 hundred." I said, "Einar, go ahead and take the 45 hundred." Now they've turned it back to the state. The people who got it, they were posie-sniffers and they gave it back for a park.

C: There was a big forest fire in your neighborhood one year, right.

Bob: Oh, yeah. That was up on the Kimmel place. We started the fire in the winter time and it apparently went out and we got a hot south wind blowing in there and it rekindled that fire and it moved clear across that 100 foot clearing and ended up over the hill, back into Smallwood.

B: George (*Lyle*) has some pretty good stories about that. That must have been about '57 because it happened not too long before we came out.

C: I remember Dad taking us all up there and we went up the road and saw the flames all licking the edges of the road.

Bob: Then BLM put me in charge of that fire and I fought that with Daylon Ward, he worked with me and Johnny Byssee, just immediate neighbors, and we fought it and finally it got to be too much and I called in, what's his name, he used to be head of the BLM up here and he authorized the rental of a cat.

C: The three of you guys were fighting it by hand?

Bob: Yeah. Anyway--what was his name?--after I got done with that fire, any time I went on a fire after that he'd tell all the fire bosses, "If Bob comes up and tells you to do something, don't ask any damn fool questions. Just go ahead and do it!"

B: Why did you have the fire going in the first place?

Bob: We were clearing land.

C: It was a rekindled burn pile.

Bob: It burned inside, hadn't come out. Moss and stuff. It did make a lot of land better. But one place back over the hill, over in back of Jackson's place it took all the moss and the permafrost out and there was a gully, a 20 foot deep gully, from the permafrost melting out.

You had to cut the firebreaks down off the hill and then you'd throw the material to the outside of the fire so you'd have a cold edge and then we'd set backfires on the inside and burn it back toward the fire.

C: Now, you got to know George Lyle in the army?

Bob: No, in the Air Force. When I first got up here I was in the Transportation Squadron, Yukon Air Group, and George was in that outfit.

C: What year was that?

Bob: That was '47. George was still at 6 Mile then at the Ordnance camp. Then they moved him up to the light-duty garage. He was workin' on Herman Nelson heaters and all that kind of stuff, on the main base. I think they did that because of he and Anne.

C: Oh, they were sweethearts?

Bob: Anne would be calling him or he'd be calling Anne. We had a W-8 field phone system set up between 6 mile and the main base, then we went on the regular line. We had to tie him in and ring him into the 6 Mile deal to get ahold of him. We had a Capt. Fox, at that time, then later Capt. _____, and both those guys were good guys. They made it convenient for them.

C: Did you ever, when you were out here homesteading, ever have a time when you went, "Oh, I just can't handle this anymore, I wanta leave"?

Bob: No, I never had that. Because of jobs and that, I wasn't there a lot of the time but it was still home. When I was working on the eight- inch pipeline, over in Canada, the eight-inch army pipeline, it came from Haines, I was in charge of security and first aid and safety on that, I rolled the ambulance over and broke my own leg. That was before seat belts and the door came open and my leg got out the door, then it rolled over again. Then it shut and latched the door on my leg. And I had to set my own leg.

C: You were out there in the woods and there was nobody around?

Bob: Well, both bones were broken and I didn't want 'em floppin' around so I set my own leg. When I got into Whitehorse, the doctor run me into x-ray and said, "Well, everything's in place."

C: What did you set it with?

Bob: I used a metal "ladder" splint on my good leg then I went down under the heel then I took ace bandages right down to the breaks, you know, from the top then rolled around from the toe and worked back in to the other and let the ace bandages draw it into place..... I had some pretty good pills along there with me and I popped about five of those before I started settin' my leg.

B: You learned all this first aid in the military?

Bob: No, I learned all that before. I was an instructor in first aid when I was sixteen. For one period of time there, I was the only instructor in the whole interior of Alaska. I missed teaching a class, you had to teach one a year to keep your credit. I missed teaching by one month and they took my ticket away. I told 'em I'm not goin' to go back and do the whole thing again. I'd worked at it and everything else, you know.

C: Did you ever have any emergency situations on the homestead?

Bob: Not really, cut my own knee with a chainsaw one time, and there were other little things and Johnny Byssee, he was sick and I had to run him back and forth to town. He was one of my fire department people out at the University.

B: Where did he live?

Bob: He just lived on my place. Then he stayed with Kimmels up north of me, you know, before I bought their place. He was a big, sick kid. They did that abdominal resection thing on him where they shorten the gut up.

C: You mean to control his weight?

Bob: And they did too much and had to go back and do it again. He went along for about a year, year and a half, after the second operation. Then it ruptured something down in there and killed him.

C: I didn't know they were doing that technique back then. Obviously they hadn't perfected it.

How about bears, did you have any encounters with bears over on your homestead?

Bob: Oh, yeah. When I first had the cabin out there, they used to raid me all the time. That's when I had the vendetta on the bears and I killed every one I could find around here.

C: Were they breaking into your cabin when you were gone or while you were there?

Bob: Not while I was there. They sensed that wasn't a good idea. I'd come out to grab something to eat and it'd all be gone. The door'd be ripped out and.....

B: Who else is on the map that we need to find out about? Oh, did you read the book by the lady who was our first mail carrier?

Bob: I haven't read her book. Martha Markey? Saw her at the Fair four or five years ago. That old Dodge panel truck she hauled the mail in, she broke the tie rod on it one time and what else? Somethin' else she broke down. One time I took her and the mail and we went out to finish out her route, then we got hold of Bob, her husband. He fixed the truck then she drove it home.

B: Where did she turn around? What was the end of her route?

Bob: First it didn't go past the Little Chena, there wasn't nobody by there. I think it had to be close to where Leroy Wells is now. Nothing beyond that.

B: Carl pulled her out with his bus, once.

Bob: Oh yeah, but she was a pretty good driver, though.

C: Did we talk about Adolph Sherrer? He was your neighbor, right? (*Looking at the map*) He had just a little piece.

Bob: No, he had the whole thing, then he sold it. What they call the Wilson place was all his.

B: Any idea what brought him into the country?

Bob: Adolph? He came in the '97 gold rush into Canada. He climbed the trail and all that business. He never had any luck on gold though. He made his real money bakin'.

B: He must have been a professional baker, wasn't he?

Bob: He was good. Later he sort of retired out here, still cut a little firewood, he kept fresh baked good and all the kids and I and a whole bunch, we always use to gather there. He was a fine old guy. Later on there was a warrant officer bought that place after he died. Can't remember the Warrant Officer's name. He was at Scofield in Hawaii when the Japs attacked. He was the band master, matter of fact.¹

B: And you knew, or knew of, the old gentleman who grew all the plants.

Bob: The trees? Betchard, yeah, Frank.

B: He would have been just across from where Nordale Rd. is now, across from Severns Rd.

Bob: Nordale probably went right through his little piece of land. He had that niece living with him when I first came.

B: How did he get in there? Was there a trail?

Bob: He'd use the winter trail. They hadn't built Nordale Rd. yet but there was still a trail, comin' down through Brockman's.

C: Did you see his orchard or fruit trees?

Bob: Yeah but that was about the end of them. Trees were gettin' tired, I guess. They got to where they weren't bearing.²

B: Did you know Rudy Bilberg?

Bob: Oh, yeah.

¹ Bette Day said the Warrant Officer's name was Wolfe.

² See attached copies of newspaper clippings about Frank Betchard.

C: Did you have any dealings with Rudy?

Bob: Not really. You know, wintertime everybody was pulling everybody else out of the ditch.

B: The roads were part of everyone's stories.

Bob: The hills were a lot steeper then. That old 4x4 Chevy dump truck of Henry Brockman's—in four-wheel drive you'd get almost to the top of the hill, you could see over the top, then spin out and he had four wheel drive. I'd still have to go down and chain that sucker up.

B: That was four mile hill?

Bob: They called that Kruger's hill.

B: I was thinking of the one by the Children's' Home.

Bob: We didn't call it four mile hill, called it something else.

B: Do you know when the Children's' Home started?

Bob: Well, it was up on Steele Creek first.

C: That was Maranatha Children's' home.

B: There were two Children's' Homes.

Bob: I know, the one down on what's now Chena Hot Springs Rd. The one back on Steele Creek, where Brices are now, it was there first.

B: I guess Funks had that property at one time, didn't they? Then they left and came back, I think. Must have sold it or didn't prove up.

Bob: I don't think they had the whole 460.??? Funks still had part of the property, I think.

B: In any case, they ended up settling down on the creek (*Steele Creek*).

Bob: What was the Funk girl's name?

C: Linda was the oldest girl, then there was Paula and Gwen.

Bob: It must have been Gwen. She used to come over and ride the horses. She'd take that big old Nick..... She could get him to do four foot jumps when he was twenty-five years old.

C: Did Gwen herd their cattle over to your place? She herded 'em on our field.

Bob: No. I was far enough away, that didn't happen.

B: How many cows did they run down there?

Bob: Must have been eight or ten. They had that old white horse and---

C: Smoky. I use to go ride Smoky.

Bob: I don't know if he died or was just gettin' poor because they had him when she use to come over to my place to ride Nick. Then my attorney's horse, my attorney's daughter's horse, she rode him. He broke his leg. He stepped in a hole somewhere, don't know where. It was all open range. You don't know where he broke it, really. He just appeared one day, hoppin' on three, you know. The attorney rigged a splint on its hind leg and it was startin' to heal pretty good then he fell in another spot and broke it again, so they had to put him down.

B: Did you know Yoder?

Bob: Art Yoder, yeah.

B: What did he do?

Bob: He worked for NC and I think he worked for the railroad, too, for awhile.

B: What about George Love?

Bob: I don't know that I ever knew him at all.

(From the earlier tape, other remembered neighbors:)

B: What about Johnny Kalina?

Bob: Oh yeah. I got his patent for him. I went out and cleared the land and filed the first time for him and got him his title.

B: Was he sort of crippled up or something?

Bob: No, no, Kalina wasn't. He had a sort of mental problem. He was Second World War, got way behind the German lines at one time, running around in a Jeep or something and he captured a whole bunch of Germans and brought 'em back. I think he's still alive. He was livin' in town.

John Cole was farther out (*the Hot Springs Rd.*). Cole, he bought the Ackerman place.

Oh, crazy McQuinn, right? He was a painter. You'd go out where he was working and you'd think there was five guys in the room and he was talking to himself. He was a good painter, you know.

B: But he proved up on his homestead?

Bob: Yeah. I did clearing for him, too, you know.

B: What do you know about Joe Kruger?

Bob: He sold the place. He went back to the states somewhere, I think. You remember how Carl kept missing gas and missing gas and finally he went out and put a shut off on (*the tank*) but he left the old barrels up there and he sugared the crap out of 'em. Joe kept losing engines.

B: Pete Aiken?

Bob: Of course. Matter of fact you know he was the first black person elected to public office in the State of Alaska? In fact, he was a witness on my homestead and I was a witness on his and I cleared the land up there for him, then went back and plowed it. Just as nice and smooth a field as you could possibly imagine. One year later, the permafrost went out of those holes and they sunk in so deep you could hide a pickup. His wife's name was Velma?

C: Right. So he did prove up on his homestead?

Bob: Oh yeah. He built the original Bull's Eye (*bar*)---wasn't the Bull's Eye then, and had the dance hall joint, and also started that animal farm down there. He had bobcats and everything else, then someone came in and let all the varmints out.

C: He had an animal farm by the Bull's Eye?

Bob: Over against the trees, back behind the field.

C: So we might have bobcats running around.

Bob: Don't think so. Don't think they'd survive the cold. One time I was coming home and I was right there by Loud's and I saw this peacock. I'd only had a couple beers that day. Oh come on, I haven't had that much. I got out and tried to catch it and it went off in the weeds. I was pretty quiet about that for awhile. You know, hallucinations. I was

talking to Bob Gamble about a year, year and a half later, and he said, "Oh yeah, I bought a hen and a rooster and the rooster got away." "Well, okay, I'm glad to hear that."

B: When did they (*Gambles*) show up on the scene?

Bob: Pretty close to the same time. Don't remember what year.

C: Around '51?

B: Because they aren't on the map, are they?

C: I think they were. They should be.

B: I think we wrote them in because we couldn't find them.

C: Just a mile and a half back.

Bob: Gamble's must be one of these clear back here.

C: Here, you've gotten Gamble written in right here. Bob, did you do much with Bob Gamble?

Bob: Oh, we were goods friends.

C: Did you guys work together?

Bob: No, he had a tin shop by Samson Hardware. What's his name, Samson Hardware,³ he used to have him make up stainless steel stovepipe. It maybe cost about half again more than galvanized, but when you bought the stainless, it lasted forever. Then he built that hangar _____ place, then he got that state ag land thing out in the valley.

B: Cora talked about that (*the ag land*) quite a bit.

Bob: He used to take equipment in, in the winter time, then finally he got that road built in. He dragged in a bunch of railroad cars to build a bridge with, across the Little Chena.

C: How far out is that land claim? About ten miles? Oh, I've been down that road.

Bob: Of course, it's really a private road. It's on a section line easement so he can't stop anybody from using it.

C: Was he raising hay down there?

³ Johnny Albright?

Bob: I don't really know. He had all the equipment out there to do that, whether he ever raised a crop. Then when he was building that road he got the D9 stuck and it wasn't a big priority, you know, so he left it sitting there. In the wintertime he went there and it was in moss. He had a chainsaw and sawed the moss out from underneath the cat. He went all the way underneath that thing, fired it up and drove it away.

Who was the guy that was there before Risse? Yeah, Merle Birkey. Had that old International Cat and he had a barrel up on top of the thing he kept full of water, antifreeze, coolant, *(because of a leaky radiator)*....

C: Do you have any photos of your original cabin? This was the one on the north side of the road?

Bob: No, No.

C: Oh, where you're at now.

Bob: Yeah. In makin' the runway, the dozer ripped it *(the original cabin)* out.

B: Could it have been a woodcutter's cabin at one time?

Bob: Either that or that old bootlegger's cabin.

C: Oh, that's right. You talked before about a bootlegger in the neighborhood.

Bob: It'd already been raided by the feds. You could see they'd mashed it flat, the copper still. They'd done the ax work on it, then they flattened it out.

C: It was right outside the cabin?

Bob: Just up above in the trees. It was there for a long time then finally Daylon Ward stole it and sold it for scrap brass.....

There was just a dug-out cabin, there was a sort of washout, came down the hill, yeah, on my place. There was just barely room for a little wood stove and a bed. No kitchen facilities there at all. "Course, it could have been a freezer in the wintertime, too. A gully came down and they just dug into the bank right there.

C: When did you get electricity at your place?

Bob: Everybody had electricity before I did. They already had electricity up at Kimmel's house. When I bought the Kimmel place I swung the power off of that over onto mine, '67-68.

C: What about water? Did you get a well?

Bob: Yeah, I drilled a well. Dick Brand and I did it. I helped him build that rotary rig and that was the first well we drilled with it. He was over off of Farmer's Loop.

B: That wasn't the Brand family that later on had Plywood Supply?

Bob: No, different family. Dick, his family, had been here for a long time. He worked up on the (Navy?) _____ on the oil stuff up there. He was up on the oil stuff there. All the wells that are on parts of my old homestead now, all of them, Dick and I drilled.

B: How deep did you have to go?

Bob: Varied between 80 feet and 207. The one I've got right now is right at 100.

C: Did you ever have anything to do with (Carl's) busses?

Bob: You remember I was telling you about the Jimmies? They was cracking heads all the time? The old WWII six-bys had that bypass from the back of the head up to the top of the radiator and I knew that was there and they didn't have any trouble crackin' heads, so I showed Carl how that was done and we did it on the one bus and he did it on all the busses.

B: What was his first bus--a Suburban of some kind? What year was that, do you know?

Bob: 1951-52, must have been in the area. It's still sittin' in the garage over there. They've still got it. I'd junked one out and saved the glass. Then Carl got it from me for replacements. She (*Carl's daughter*) was having an auction and was selling this pile of glass, you know. I said, you better keep this, you still got the van.

The Chevy Suburbans and vans, they make the best cesspools of any car. They'll last longer, underground, than any other car. The body was heavy, you know. You could put a Nash Rambler down and it'd last one or two years. All you could find after one or two years was the chrome bumpers. That's all would be left.

B: How far out did Carl's route go?

Bob: With that Suburban, he went out, at first, I think he turned around at my place, picked up the kids there, then the Ward kids. Don't think there was anyone on out there at that time.

B: Lot of those guys was bachelors, weren't they?

Bob: Well, Jackson wasn't. He had a house right by old Main School, downtown. That's where his wood yard was. O'Leary, Bernard, he was a bachelor but he had a whole bunch of family. The Kimmel kids, I think, were the first ones out. Then the Ward kids. There were somebody's kids living in the old cabin on the Wilson place, then the Days (*bought the Wilson place and*) came out later. I helped build that house, too, and wired it.

B: The one that Clark's are in now?

C: Do you remember when the Days brought all the Shetland ponies out?

Bob: Yeah, you remember he filed on a homestead down below the house, across the road, where the Quonset was, down there? Yeah, Jim's dad was bringing up two or three different loads different summers and they sold them around the country.

B: He also brought goats. And chickens.

Bob: And farm machinery. He brought ratty old farm machinery and we'd have to rebuild it before we could use it.....

B: What kind of a shop did you have to do all this?

Bob: All outdoors. Well, Jim had a shop.

B: Bette said they had a sawmill.

Bob: Down below the road, yeah. Matter of fact, what was his name, Johnny Cole, was one of the best sawyers in this country. When he cut a 2x4 it was a 2"x4".

C: Where was he? On out farther?

Bob: He also filed for something up on Amanita.

B: Well, he filed for Jim, from what Bette said. Jim had already filed, couldn't file a second time so Johnny--

Bob: No actually, they filed together on that first, then Jim filed on this property.

B: In any case, they worked together. So Cole was a sawyer. Any idea what brought him up here?

Bob: Come up to work, I guess. He and Jim came up about the same time. They were part of the five people who started the Laborers' Union here. Jim set up the retirement program which, to this day, is the best union retirement system in the world. The international keeps wanting to take it over so they can get all the money.

C: The military brought you up here, right?

Bob: The ice fog was so bad in Fairbanks, we couldn't land so we had to go across the mountains into Anchorage. I got off the airplane, an ol' C82, and I wanted back on the plane. I wanted to go home. And I still feel the same about Anchorage. We came up *(to Fairbanks)* on the Alaska Railroad. I told you about the snow slide and we had to hole up at the old Park hotel. When we were flyin' up we landed at Ft. Nelson and they had Crown Royal. Canadian Crown Royal is 100 proof and American Crown Royal is only 85 or 87 or somethin' like that. We still had it when we got into the hotel down there and what a party that was. If I tried to drink like that now, it'd kill me. Then I came up and after about a year I got the urge so I went down and joined the Presbyterian Church. I'm still a member down there.

C: So that's how you know Henry Gettinger, through the Presbyterian Church?

Bob: No, I knew him when he was still in the Air Force. He was head mechanic for 10th Rescue. He worked on helicopters and everything else but he had the helicopter ratings and after he got out of the service, he'd work fine for helicopter mechanics, make good money, even now it'd be good money, and he wouldn't take the job. And he had the cleanest airplanes, safety wires and stuff on an airplane, you'd never snag yourself. He'd tie 'em in and rope 'em back in.

B: It'd be interesting to know how many people on the road at that time were vets. Like the old fellow who was in Dawson.

Bob: He was in Kaiser Bill's army, before WWI and he deserted and came over here.

C: Which one was that?

Bob: Sherrer, Adolph Sherrer.

B: A lot of those people, were vets—Walt and George and your dad, Colleen, and Carl.

Bob: Everybody got sucked up into the military, unless you were fallin' down.

B: But some of them were here before *(the war)*.

C: Carl and Harold were.

Bob: Before the war? Were they out on the Chain? Attu?

C: No. None of my dad's brothers were sent to action because they didn't have a father. They were the support of their mother.

B: George, you said, was overseas.

Bob: He was Navy at that time, later he was in the Air Force.

(from the earlier tape:)

Bob: He *(George Lyle)* went into the Air Force after the war but he was on the ship...

C: Someone said he was in the Normandy invasion.

Bob: Yeah, he was on a ship....

C:...and the Marines or something went in, then George and his equipment battalion, or something followed them, a construction team or something.

Bob: I didn't know that. I didn't know that George was that much older. He was 86, was he? He was six years older than I was. I just barely missed a couple World Wars.

Oh, and Bobby Miller. He was on the combat deal—when they took back the islands on the Chain. Then he got reassigned here to Ladd and never went anywhere else.

B: So he wasn't here when he went into the military?

Bob: Oh, yeah. His family was here forever. Bobby was a good poker player. He said he was sittin' on the Chain when they got the combat action over, he won over a quarter of a million dollars in poker games.

C: And that started his junk yard?

Bob: You know they had all that property right there where the old railroad depot was. Their house was right there. It was part of the old Miller homestead. When I first came, there was still a windmill down there, right alongside the railroad. The railroad may have bought some of their property to build the depot. That may not have been their homestead, that may have been a big chunk of property. Old Mrs. Miller, she raised gardens up until she was way up in her late eighties.

C: Oh, I have a question. Dad said you always went around with a six-shooter on your belt.

Bob: I don't know about the six-shooter. It was a Colt.

C: Did you ever need to use it?

Bob: Oh, on varmints, yeah. I used it a few times. Never had to shoot anybody but when they look down that big 45 caliber hole, they lose enthusiasm.

C: You've done a really nice job of covering a lot of different people in the neighborhood that we didn't know much about. Everybody has a little different angle.

B: But you all overlap. I'm trying to think of the name of the man up on Bennett Rd., that I interviewed. Lives above Fabian. Oh, Terry Moran.

Bob: Oh, yeah, he was with the railroad.

C: I wonder why this whole collection of railroad guys---

B: Well, one of them got the property and told the others about it. One of them talked about the fact that Bennett settled up here first and built a road into his place, then the next guy added on to his place.

Bob: Les Loud was the one who really got the road built. Then they named it after old Pop Bennett. Old Pop Bennett, he made one payment into Social Security under the old ag deal and then they paid him the maximum they paid out for Social Security. They did that to get him to come in under the ag act. Then he just retired.

B: What do you know about him? There was a Bennett who was a pretty well known pilot.

Bob: That wasn't him.

C: Thank you so much, Bob.

B: Yes, I sure appreciate your being willing to do this again.

I agree to share this story with earlier interviewees and others interested in local history.

name

date

This transcript was made and edited by Bruth George.