

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-07
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:49
Original Media:	Dictabelts (red)
Digitized By:	Northeast Document Conservation Centre using IRENE method
Digitization Date:	December 2024
Narrator:	Clyde 'Slim' Williams
Interviewer:	It would appear that Richard 'Dick' Morenus gave Slim Williams the Dictabelt recorder and Slim is just telling stories into the machine by himself. Dick is not on the recording at all.
Others Present:	N/A
Recording Location:	Chicago, Illinois
Transcriber:	Leslie McCartney
Transcription Date:	December 13, 2024
Access:	The dictabelts were donated to us by the great-nephew of Dick Morenus who inherited them from his mother (Dick's niece). Slim and his wife never had children so there is no next of kin. We have a signed Letter of Transmittal on file from Dick's great-nephew. For public/electronic use.
Where to Find this in Text:	These recordings were made by Clyde 'Slim' Williams so that Richard 'Dick' Morenus could write Slim's story in book form. It was published as <i>Alaska Sourdough, the Story of Slim Williams</i> by Richard Morenus (1956). New York: Rand McNally & Company. The book is available on Internet Archive https://archive.org/details/alaskasourdoughs0000rich/mode/2up or in the Elmer E. Ramuson Library, F909.M75 Alaska Collection. Where possible, the pages of where some of the transcribed stories appear in the book are noted.

(00:00:00)

Slim Williams: [starts mid-sentence] come in had in the west 'cuz they got no competition, there's never gonna be squatters come in to run around. So let's keep those Eskimos to raise their reindeer, give 'em some planes so they can fly 'em out to the States. There's no better meat than reindeer meat. They could get twice for it here what they could in get for beef. They could fly out reindeer meat and put it

storage, take care of it right, fly back material if they wanted material, groceries and the like, they could be the happiest, richest nation in the world if they wanted, people in the world if they just was taught a little bit. But what do they know about all our fancy stuff here? When I first got 'em they thought they was about the only people, you ... hunters, whalers come up there and killed all their whale and then the White Man come up and killed all their walrus and then the canneries come up and took all their salmon away from 'em. They've got nothing. But if the White Man would just let alone and let their fish alone, let 'em increase a little bit so they can eat a few, and teach them about the reindeer, lots of things, I'll go nuts over this I gotta stop. I'll tell you what, like Dick, see this made into a magazine article if it could. Boy it that's a thing that is needed worse than anything I know. Those marvelous people up there, just, just imagine movin' their children, down to Anchorage, why it would be most dastardly thing that is ever thought of. Of course the Chamber of Commerce says yes, we'll accept your schools. The government will come up there and build a million dollar school or two around their town and just to put a few Eskimos in, why, yeah, the Eskimos are alright but it will just give the White Man that much more chance to take 'em down the degraded road that they've started on. It's really the worst crime. That little woman, I'd like to talk to her. [dead air from 00:02:02 until 00:02:12]

00:02:12

Well, the begin of being the wise of a railroad leavin' Valdez and one leavin' the coast from [long pause] Cordova. So I headed for Valdez. Well, I was broke as usual. Needed a job and it they was startin' to pack train out and I gotta job on the pack train. I picked for my saddle horse I picked out a little one-eyed [inaudible] a pretty little animal. Put the saddle on 'em and forked him and he immediately throwed me. But it only took two or three days and I kinda got used to it and back in the saddle again I felt at home. Well, we had 14 [inaudible] pack horses and two saddle horses of course and one way we went, had to go, was up a switch-back and over a mountain. And at one place we had to go around an awful narrow place, just barely room for a pack horse to go and this little one-eyed horse of mine, eye went one way where his eye was to the bluff, fell off about 1,000 feet almost straight down, when his eye was to the bluff why he'd go four-eyed, but when I was comin' back, and his eye was the other way and he couldn't see the bluff, why you walk right along the narrow ledge and boy I was ready to roll off that saddle pretty near any time. But you know, I've been asked so many times that the Iron Trail wasn't kinda overdone. Well the Iron Trail was written just about that. It was argument over that right-of-way and a lot of argument too. And, one of the weak ... at times when the river was really low, why we could cross the river about three times save climbing up this hill. Well, this morning it looked fine and thought we could get cross the river so we got all packed up and we had to go out behind a little knoll, there was a cut through it for the grade, but we went on the river bar outside and just as I come out from the other side of the little knoll, there was some men goin' through the cut and wham, a rifle commenced to crack.

00:04:38

And bullets commenced to whiz by my head. I don't know how many bullets was fired but seemed to me like a hundred, I guess there was only a few because there's only one man killed and I believe two crippled. But somebody was shootin' at us and boy did I get back behind that little knoll, I'm tellin' ya, get back to camp. Well I got hold of my rifle and rode up the switchback to where I could see up the valley ahead. I couldn't see anything, kinda glad I didn't 'cuz I might have been playin' long tall with somebody got in trouble. But anyhow, we went on workin', of course that thing stayed in court for years, nobody's ever convicted, they oughta been hung but there wasn't ... a lot of things like that happened up there. But anyhow, along towards fall I had a friend workin' in the bank in Valdez and he sent me out a letter. He says get in here quick, railroad's goin' broke. So I saddled my little one-eyed horse and I headed down that grade. Well goin' down the grade there's quite a cut off so down the

grade I went and stood around the trail. Come to a clear water stream that had no bridge across it. And I just spurred my horse and he lunged in and we went plumb outta sight. Well, got into town, went into the bank too late. It was closed up, everybody's broke. Val took a lien on the horses for our wages, hay was \$125 a ton, we just couldn't do it, we had to let that go. But I had made a trip across the first lower part of the river about a week before that and five horses got across with their loads and my partner headed the others off so they all didn't get across. We didn't loose any packs but we see it's too bad to cross anymore than once so instead of bringin' a horse across back this river with their packs on I just took their packs off and cached them under a rock and throwed their [inaudible] over 'em and I knew they'd keep alright.

00:06:46

Well after the railroad went broke and things kinda got settled down I got a thinking about that cache. So I borrowed myself a spring wagon, it was fall by that time and I needed somethin' to live on so I borrowed this spring wagon and went up and got that cache. I figured partly payment for wages anyhow. Well sir it was [inaudible] and tobacco and blankets and everything I didn't need but I sold it anyhow and got some money out of it. There it was fall comin' on and broke and several of us there livin' in cabin. Well we started workin' the boats, longshorin'. We would, if boat come in at night, why there'd be one man set up all night and watch and the boat would show up in about an hour, showed up in the bay about an hour before it got in, why you'd run down and wake all the boys up, we'd go down, we knew the dock manager too and so we just about all get on to work. And there's where I went and n lost another fortune. Boy I lost a lot of them in the north. There's a fella by the name of Ellis there. I thought he was a screwball for sure but proved later of course that I was a screwball. Well he had come up there, he a little older than I, not much, but he had red hair and he wore it long, he'd never cut his hair, shaved, ever since he'd come up there. I understood that he said when he came up there that he wasn't gonna cut his hair or shave until he made a stake. Well, he didn't. But, this Ellis, his long hair and beard and everything, we'd made \$13 and half a piece on that boat and he said to me, he said Slim, if you'll put the \$13 in the grub I'll put my \$13 in the grub and we'll go down to the cliff mine and we'll work. And he says I'll give you a half interest in the mine.

00:08:40

Well, I didn't want to hook up with screwball like that as I thought he was see. But it wasn't but a few years until he taken out a \$125,000 outta that mine and then he sold it for \$125,000 and I understood that he retained a 10% interest and took somethin' like \$100,000 out of that again. Well, just another mistake. I made lots of 'em. Man can't learn it all you know. But you know, there was three men there all young fellas that I made friends with, I was the only one broke in the bunch all the rest of them was doin' something. But one was Holt, one was Diamond,

[Slim has moved away from the recorder and getting harder to hear at this point. He continues to move further away as the recording goes on and it becomes harder to hear what he saying.]

one was Bunnell. Well of course everybody there ever went to a movie knows who Jack Holt was and I spent some time, forty good years after [inaudible] on his ranch in California, my [inaudible] well, Diamond he took to law. And he was a honey and one of the best thought of [inaudible] everybody knew [inaudible] and you gotta be prosecuting attorney. Well when he got him there why everybody knew they'd get a square deal if they went to Tony because his arguments with the law or wanted questions out. Sometimes there'd be two fellas and goin' to court over somethin' and they'd go see Tony one of 'em and ask Tony [inaudible] the other fella, he'd settle the whole shebang without any court proceedings at all, send 'em away happy, maybe not even charge 'em a fee. After that, he was

sent to Washington D.C. as our delegate elected and he spent about 12 years there and then, now, he's a Federal Judge in Anchorage, one of the best thought of men in the north and the best known. For all his position even if you walkin' down the street and you're liable to hear any old timers say hello Tony, where you goin'? Well maybe call anythin' else you'd be disappointed.

00:10:58

Because he's just one of those kinda guys. Well, Bunnell he took a notion that he'd go to Fairbanks and started them school for rough-necks like me. Not anybody that prospected he'd just ... about prospectors and that just give 'em a little education, it paid alright [inaudible] so he could [inaudible]. Well thought his efforts and his efforts about alone, that the University of Alaska is founded. He put about 90% I'd say responsible for the Alaska University, one of the finest colleges I think [inaudible] and he responsible for so many kids' education except they didn't have any money to go to school he'd give a job out [inaudible] store, anyplace so they could work their way through college. At one time I understand it that 90% of the kids would always have a job at the school. And the kids always had a job in the summer because people would send all over the north somebody, some kid work for 'em for the summer. That's Bunnell's [inaudible]. And today he's retired but I think those two men have done more by far than any other [inaudible] in Alaska for culture and law and making Alaska what it is. And I'm sure proud to be able to call them friends [inaudible]. I go to the north and don't get to see both of 'em I think [inaudible]. [dead air from 00:012:39 to 00:12:46]

00:12:46

(Slim is very far away from the microphone and his very hard to hear when he starts then gets nearer to the microphone and is easier to understand as the recording continues on).

[inaudible] got to be some town [inaudible] lots of buildings, seems to me like about 2/3 of them was honky-tonk saloons or something but she was sure a goin' town. I stood on the corner one morning at two o'clock and with the Marshall and watched five fights goin' on at once. There had been an army post put in across the bay they called it, Fort Liscum and the soldiers would come over there, sailors come in, well of course the Marshall's couldn't [inaudible] but if they got too tough why he'd either kick 'em in the pants and send them on to the ship or over Liscum or he'd bump their heads together and make 'em be good kids. He got along with them alright but she was quite a wild town I'm tellin' ya. But when I hit town sometimes I was just outta luck again. I had lots of luck, but it was all bad. I didn't know this for six or seven years afterwards what had happened [end of recording].