

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-08
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:13
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 15, 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 at 00:00:11 mid-sentence] a little with money, we made as much as \$6,000 in there at one time in one year but long fairly early in the winter, my partner come back to camp, he had been downriver, he'd met a guy he's from Fairbanks and used to driftin' and he said Slim, he said he wants to come up and help him drift. He said he's got a lay on the black ground and he said it might just

a barrel of money in there. Well, we hooked up dogs and went up and took a look at it, decided we didn't want it. My partner said well, he says, we can go get a nice load of sheep, have a bunch of sheep down on the lake where critters come along, and with our trappin' he said I believe we'll make just as much money, and we didn't kinda like the fella anyhow. So we decided we'd go back, and hunt sheep, and finish our trappin' and meet the [inaudible] and come in [inaudible] outfitters with it like [inaudible]. We got 50 cents a pound for sheep, we wasn't doin' bad. So we meet this [inaudible] sure enough and sold our meat, well when we got into Slate Creek, a snow slide had come, and he'd got two other fellas to help with on his drifting and the snow slide had come and caught the two of 'em. And, we helped dig 'em out. Well it was way along into the summer before we finally got 'em out. Found one of the them right away, we had a long bar and we'd test down through the snow, and find somethin' and maybe there's a dog, maybe a man but we found one man early but other we couldn't until ... now one of the men that we found last had lived a long time because the hole was thawed around his face where he breathed and he must have lived for, oh, four, five six maybe more hours because there was a thaw around his face, oh, six, eight inches from his face, this big hole and of course it had sealed over again and smothered him. But, just lucky kid again, didn't get into that snow slide.

00:02:17

Well the summer of '13 the water wasn't good, it all had bored. We wasn't doing much at all, and I was, got some horses I was carryin' mail in to Slay Pit. I gotta dollar a letter and a dollar pound for everything that I brought in, doing pretty good, and between times I go huntin' and hunt meat for the camp, always sell meat. I was doin' pretty good and I was down at the post office one day and an old friend of mine, Carl, oh, I forget his name but I'll you but ... come to me and he said Slim, I've made a strike. He said I struck in the Sushana. Now he says my partner, no, it wasn't his partner because Carl never had a partner, not very often, he was pretty much a lone wolf. I was a lone wolf a lot, but he was more so than I, he was a lone wolf about all the time. And he said, now, he said I'm gonna tell you and he said I'm gonna tell Bud Sergeant, that's the only two I'm gonna tell, and we agreed to that, and fellow he was with when he struck it, and so they'd only be four and make no stampede. Well, I just about killed my horses getting back to Slate Creek and told my partner what was up, I knew he wouldn't come, he just wasn't that kind. I told him I'd promised Carl I wouldn't tell anybody. So, I lit out, and boy I just tore myself across country and caught up with Bud, we went on in together. Well it was sure a ... it's small creek, very rich, but the first time we'd ever panned an ounce to one pan, but Bud and I was walkin' up the creek, we come to a couple of them creeks, and he said gee, these look good he said they're might be something on these creeks and I said ya, let's stake 'em. Alright he said you stake your side and I'll stake mine, which we did, and that summer he took out \$60,000 and I never got a color.

00:04:20

Well, anyhow, I ... Bud was getting along on years and didn't get over the trail too fast, so I took his papers and headed for the recording station where I could get 'em recorded and I met my partner. I see him comin' for a mile over the divide and I knew it was him and wondered what was the matter. When he got up I said what the devil are you doin' here. He says there's the damndest stampede on you ever heard about. He says all of Dawson behind me, says their comin' from all directions and he says I'm gonna try and get in there and stake some. This ... Carl's partner had went into Dawson and got drunk and just told everyone. [dead air between 00:05:09 and 00: 05:14]

00:05:14

Well he went on in but he never struck anything, and I went on recorded my claims about 300 miles, and I couldn't get a horse, so I got me three good dogs, and I packed them up with all they could carry and all I could carry and started back. Well now you'd think those rivers at that time of the year ain't

tough you're just gathered wrong. You wade in to your knees or to your waist or what have you and just at the top of the water it feels like a knife is just cutting ya, 'cuz we was high in the mountains and just coming right out from under the glacier, and boy those streams are cold when you wade 'em. Well anyhow I went to all of that to find out it didn't have anything, but that was a devil of a stampede.

00:05:56

They was just thousands of people coming in there from all over the country, and it's such a small creek that the claims were all staked by the two fellas just start on 'em but of course they didn't know that that, didn't know how big it was but they took out some awful good money. But nobody else did. But, anyhow, there was a man that while I was gone to record my claims had stole some grub from somebody and they held a miner's meeting and hung him. You might wonder why they hung a man for stealing up there, well, you might get away with murder but you didn't get away with goin' into a man's cabin and stealin' his grub, they just hung you for it that's all there was to it because that was just about equal to murder. If a man come back and found no grub there, he'd starve to death. So stealing of anything like [inaudible] you wanted to go into a man's cabin, help yourself to what you wanted to eat, leave a note tellin' him you took enough with you to leave that, that was alright but just don't stealin' that's all because they'll hang you for it, or they would, of course we're getting' kinda civilized there now.

00:7:06

But anyhow there's where the rabbits and ptarmigan helped everybody, if it hadn't been for that there a been a lot of people starved to death, I'm tellin' ya because they would just thousands of rabbits just everyplace and there was the ptarmigan. There was a little rock ptarmigan. There's two kinds in Alaska, the high mountain ptarmigan, they call them a rock ptarmigan, and then the low valley ptarmigan. The valley ptarmigan is a bit big bigger but rock ptarmigan is awful tame, they just, they're like [inaudible] they won't fly and everybody carried what they call a ptarmigan stick. It was a stick like about a good sized cane, and you'd walk right up to them things you know within ten feet of 'em, they won't fly if they don't have to, and there was just thousands of them. Well, you could walk up to a bunch of them ptarmigan and be maybe twenty, thirty in a bunch, and get that cane back and let it fly a whirlin' and a lot of times you'd get three or four of 'em. Well three or four of 'em just more than a man can eat. So the timing of the rabbits sure did help that stampede out. One man come in over, what you call it, the Cook Trail, it's a might tough trail, and he come in with about fifteen horses loaded with provision, and peddled it out. Well, he had a unique way of selling it, he was charging a dollar a pound for freight coming in. So we'll say that he paid three dollars for a sack of flour, why he'd charge ya three dollars for the sack of flour and fifty dollars to pack it in, so it makes the sack of flour cost ya fifty-three dollar. If you wanted a shirt, he'd weigh it, it'd weigh a pound and it cost him five dollars outside, why that's what you paid and he sold everything on ... he said that saved a lot too. That was ... but that was one of the worst stampedes I think I was ever on. It is a time of year that things were tough in the way of getting in and out. There was some boats come up the Tanana River and got up pretty near that far but if it hadn't been for the rabbits, there would have been a lot of deaths on that stamped. [dead air from 00:09:12 to 00:09:15]

00:09:15

Well Carl finished up cleaning up that ground and then he went over and struck a quartz claim, and I don't know how much money he made, but just a barrel of it anyhow. He's gone now, but when he left why he had all the money that he just knew what to do with. Last time I seen 'em he said I dunno, he said, I just got more money than I know what to do with. [dead air from 00:09:35 to 00:09:45]

00:09:45 (this story appears starting on page 194 in the book)

And there was, in the spring, there was a big noise about silver foxes, everybody wanted silver foxes and for a pup fox or older ... that you could catch, you could just get anything you asked about, everybody was just crazy, everybody gonna make a million dollars catching silver fox, [inaudible] silver foxes. Well I was down in my cabin one mornin' and a bear come walkin' along, just the other side of the river, and, small river you could wade, lots of salmon run up in the summertime, and I just reached up and got my rifle and killed the bear. I want it for dog feed. Salmon hadn't quite got there yet. And I went over and the thing had two little cubs, gee they wasn't much bigger than cats, and I'd killed the mother. Well I, gee, I couldn't kill them cubs, and I brought 'em over home. They didn't fight with very little. The mother was gone and didn't interfere much. The mother was doin' it probably fought a lot but her being dead, why they just kinda cuddled up to her, then when I brought 'em over to the cabin why they kinda cuddled up to me and, I had a quite a bit of milk and I fed 'em milk, and some mush until the fish got there and then I feed 'em on fish and gee they just got along fine. Well, we didn't know anything about getting foxes so our first effort was to dig one out.

00:11:11

We had watched a den until we see there was one pup and the mother was a silver. Well we decided that we'd dig them out. We caught the mother in a trap and put her in a little pen we had and then went to digging. Well we dug about twenty hours, that was a craziest thing that ever a man done. Now today I know enough to go to a fox den and make a noise like a fox, and they'll come out and catch 'em. But I didn't know anything then, you got a lot to learn. We dug and dug until we was just plumb wore out, and we got one silver and one little red. The father was red, the mother was silver so you're liable to get anything, we didn't know it then. But the silver of course worth money, the red wasn't worth a thin dime. But we'd caught the mother and decided to bring 'em back to the cabin. Well we went to bed and long towards the morning that little red he got to hollerin'. I get up and fed 'em some milk. I finally too the other two and took 'em out [inaudible]. But left me with a two bear and a fox and a bunch of young pups. I was raisin' my dog team at the same time. So I didn't have nothin', enough milk for all of 'em so about once a day I'd take this fox pup out, he'd just got his eyes opened, and the pups about the same age and I'd take him out and let 'em suck the mother dog and get his belly full maybe come back and sleep and I'd feed him a little mush and things. I raised him, got along fine, I had the salmon comin' course it was no trouble at all. After the salmon got there why I'd go out and catch a bunch of salmon, course the bears eat them raw, they'd eat anything, didn't need to bother about them much but this little fox, I trained the dogs to let him alone, and I had to hold him when I let him suck the pup's mother. But I would cook some salmon for the [end of recording]