

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-19
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:02
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:	February 3, 2025
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: I think about those sleds I just don't know. Now, they was a basket sled that we had there. Now they made a sled in Seattle they called it the Yukon Sled. When we gone up there we called it a Yukon Curse. It was made solid with bolts and it was about 14 inches wide and about 7 feet long. But when you ... we begin to get inside, why they had this basket sled. Now if you wanted a good Yukon

Sled, was just as stiff as a board but when you wanted to buy a good basket sled, you'd set 100 pound on the nose of it, say a 12 foot sled, and twist it over. If it would twist half way over, why you had a good runnin' sled. They just kinda weaved as they went along. Well now whether the Russians made ... told 'em how to make those whether they taught us, I don't know but here's what I did see north of Nome when I was up for that ... lookin' for that jade. I drove into a camp, a Eskimo camp, and just nicely got put out. You know the Eskimos at that time would put out your dogs for ya and sp... and take care of ya and they would just the most hospitable people on earth. Now of course they'll say how much when you come in.

00:01:33

And you needn't be afraid of them stealin' anything. Well anyhow I had only been in a few minutes when this fella come in with his sled. He had eight dogs on it and three are ridin' . Well I'd heard about it about I'd never seen it. Now the sled was made was made like a basket sled only it was about 4 feet wide and about 6 foot long. Now of course that was made to run on the crust. You'll have a snow when we get into the barren. And in 2 or 3 days we'll have a wind and that'll make a crust that you could just run over with a sled, nearly always. Well, this thing was shod with ivory tusks, walrus tusk cut off so the bull was down but long then they was holes in 'em and they was lashed to the bottom of the runners which made the sled run on ivory. Well I always took a little trade goods along, tobacco and tea mostly, well when that fella drove in with that sled I wanted to know what it was all about if I could. So, with this little trade goods I give 'em a plug of tobacco and pound of tea if he'd take me for a ride. Well I had a devil of a time convincing him that I wanted to go for a ride. I had my dog team there, he couldn't figure it all out.

00:02:56

And he wanted to unhook his dogs and I wouldn't let 'em. Well he was had his dogs fan shaped. Now, everyone was fastened with a different rope to his sled and it seemed to me just anyplace. Now, the harness was made, the ... so you'd take a rope and put it over your neck, bring it between you shoulders and cross it, then bring it up, across your breast and cross it, then bring it up between your shoulders, then there's a rope, run from there to the back of your neck and another one runs back to the sled. Well that's the kinda [00:03:37 dead air or Slim moves away from the microphone to 00:3:40 and then barely audible] could use that altogether. I finally got on the sled and [inaudible] give 'em all the motions I could I give 'em my Indian sign language didn't mean a thing in the world and finally I got 'em to take off. Well, he took off and I think it was about five miles that he picked one of his dogs up off of the sled, first he reached out and got hold one of them tow rows and he drugged [dragged] one dog back to 'em. And [recorder is turned off for a few seconds]

00:04:15 [Slim starts again mid-sentence] front of the sled and put his toe out between the dog's hind legs. Well now that tow line of his was just about between his shoulders, a little back of that and he give his toe a flip and the rope would jerk and that little dog was right in his lap. Then he set 'em back. He ... he had a button on the back of that harness and he unbuttoned that, set the dog back, put another one in his lap and buttoned him on. Then he kinda set 'em on his toe and give 'em a kick in the boot and that dog just let a runnin' that's all there was to it. And first thing you know he was ridin' the team. Well, from that ... I had 'em turn around then, come back home, I'd had all the ride I wanted, I'd seed how it happened and but all the way back, why I did kept givin' this two dogs and havin' him button 'em on me and gettin' quite a kick out of it. By that time I was laughin' like a fool I guess but he was gettin' a quite a kick out of me laughin' about him buttonin' the dogs [inaudible] and he got laughin' too and we just had a whale of a good time. They laugh all the time anyhow. They're the happiest people on earth. They was

those days of course and but comin' back I kept passing 'em up dogs and he'd hook 'em on and I kept lookin' for 'em to miss one.

00:05:33

But I think he changed a dozen times comin' back that 5 miles but not a dog missed, he just kept a comin'. Well that was one sled that I see there. Then another was, it was made just like our Yuk ... basket sleds only it was made of whale bone. Now, it was all lashed together with thong the same as ... and the runners was whale bone, everything was whale bone except the cross piece in front. That was wood. But all the rest was just whale bone, lashed together or sewed together and that was the darndest thing that ever I seen. Now I believe that was strictly Eskimo, I can't believe anything else. [dead air from 00:06:21 to 00:06:26]

00:06:26

Now about the fish wheel I had never seen one but that winter about 100 miles down the Copper, a fella was tellin' me he was gonna put in one. Now I believe that they used 'em on the Columbia River and I think that where he see one, now I'm not sure, but that's what I got in my head now anyhow. But he kinda explained what it was. Well, I didn't think then anything about puttin' in fish wheel, never thought it, fact is I never figured they had more than 15 minutes anyhow at any time but yet there was an awful good example right in front of me. They ... the Indian would build this little platform out into the water, 'cuz it's got about 3 foot deep, then they would stand there with this basket. The basket was about 18 inches across the top with a long pole in it, about 12, 14 foot long. And it went kinda down to a point. Well they would throw that upstream, let it float down, mouth down stream then when a fish would hit it they would feel it and drag 'em out. Well, just about every third throw they'd get a fish, sometimes every throw. There was lots of fish in the river then, if they hadn't a been my fish wheel wouldn't have cost anything ... caught anything. It wouldn't today, very little because I had it in the wrong place now of course I know I learned afterwards. But at that time, any fish wheel would have caught fish anyplace. But this fella tellin' me about it and then I sited up that basket and I just figured I could make one.

00:08:05

I'd been told that they worked on pontoons. Well I figured they had worked just as well on a raft so I made me two rafts and spread 'em apart, braced 'em, outta dry logs, and then I rigged my fish wheel on 'em. They're just like a water wheel only two scoops opposite each other has a kinda of a basket just a ... a kinda of a dip basket. And I had this in much too slow water in too deep of water. I knew that ... know that now, but I didn't then, but as I say the fish was so thick that you could catch 'em anyplace. Well, I started to buildin' this wheel, I'd never seen one run, but just a little horse sense is about all you need knows what any of them things anyhow and a good imagination. So, as I build my wheel and they kinda snickered at it and kinda made fun of it, by the time I got it build, why I was just kinda worryin' a little bit for fear it wouldn't work and as I said it wouldn't of today because the fish are pretty near all gone on the Copper but ... the canneries caught 'em out, but today, if you want to put in a fish wheel, why you put it in a just below a kinda a still place and pretty fast water where the water's about 3 feet deep and you let your basket dip within about an inch and half or two inches off the bottom. And you got this spikes along so you can raise your fish wheel up an inch and put a peg in to raise your fish wheel or lower it as the water lower and raises. So, it was just lucky or just lots of fish is the reason I caught so many that summer. But, I had never seen one, didn't really know how they worked.

00:09:56

Now about Jack Hold. Now of course I knew him before we started and we even travelled together for a couple of hundred miles, I knew just about where he was goin' and he knew about where I was goin'. So,

we built our cabins about 40 miles apart. Then we run our traplines together. Now he had ... got in a good marten country. I got in marten and lynx and fox and some mink and so he trapped pretty near altogether for marten. But we made a lean-to when we got together of built up logs and about 3 feet on 2 sides, left a breezeway between them ... the regular [inaudible] that the Indians used to make ... they make the north now as far as that's concerned, only a little more elaborate. Then we built a roof on it and covered it with moss, couple of feet deep, lots of moss, and we could just drag a log in from each end of the breezeway and one sleep on either side and we just had a dandy place. We used to get together quite a bit.

00:11:05

And we visited each other's cabins quite a bit. Well, when spring come and we was through catchin' why he had a quite a bit more expensive bunch of fur than I had. I had just as much fur, maybe a little more in quality ... or quantity, but his was the best in quality. And he got ta thinkin' now by gee, we just talked it over what we was goin' to do with our fur and he said I'm goin' out and sell mine. He says I can bring you back and pay my expenses out and make more money and get a trip out for nothin' and sell these furs for really some good money. Well I was just too busy to go out, I wanted to see more of the country and decided I wouldn't go out so Jack left and that's really the last I heard of 'em for years. Then when I got to the fair, and back in '34, why I made up my mind I'd spend my 34 at the fair and then I'd go back to Alaska in the winter. But I met Gladys and I didn't know ... couldn't figure out quite what kinda a trapper she's gonna make and I worried a little bit into long into the middle of the summer then they's havin' this fair in California. And some ... a fella come to me and wanted me to go to the fair in California.

00:12:38

Well I guessed a while and thought awhile and figured awhile and I kinda wanted to see my sisters in California anyhow so I just told him yes, I'd come to the fair so I did. And ... well when we got through then I was ... I had my dogs, I'd fixed up a trailer, a 4-wheel trailer with boxes on the truck [end of recording]