

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-21
Date of Recording:	1955
Length of Recording:	00:13:50
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 4, 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: [Slim starts mid-sentence] and ... well, when we got through then I was ... I had my dogs, I'd fixed up a trailer, a 4-wheeled trailer with boxes on the trailer and pulled the dogs behind my sled ... my car with a sled up on top, is a kinda a wiggly wheelie affair but never the less we just got along fine. Had a good time goin' out and got to California, to the fair, and everything worked out fine but we was

startin' back and towards it is summertime then or fall and I wasn't quite sure what I was gonna do and I didn't know how it happened but I was drivin' up Hollywood Boulevard and a great big limousine drove up beside of me and had a driver in the front seat and the guy all swelled up in the back seat and he stopped he said mister, where you goin'? Well traffic was so darn bad, I didn't know where I was gonna, I was lookin' for a place to camp. He said mister, where you goin'? I said I don't know, I said I'm goin' north. Well he said where you gonna stop tonight? I says I don't know. Then he said, follow me, he says I'll take you to a good place. He says I gotta place for you to stop.

00:01:15

So, we dropped in behind 'em and [dead air for a few seconds] he took us in to what I believe is the Universal Lot and found us a nice place to camp and boy, place to live, it was just swell. And so, I gotta talkin' to 'em. He offered me 250 dollars, a contract, 250 dollars a week for a year if I would join the movies. He was gonna make a movie actor outta me, that's what he's gonna do and my dogs too as far as that's concerned. Well I was thinkin' the thing over and I got to thinkin' gee, Jack Holt is here someplace in Hollywood so I asked him, I said, say do you know Jack Holt? Why yes he said, he workin' around over there on the lot he says, workin' now. He said did you know 'em? I said yes, I trapped with him in Alaska. Well he said do you think ya'd know 'em know? I said I don't know. Well he said do ya think Holt would know you? I says I got no idea. He had ... said common he said, we'll go see 'em. Well, he took me over and a kinda stall affair and right out in front of Jack. Jack was back in the ... on his lot or somethin' I dunno they's takin' pictures anyhow and soon as we come up he said CUT. And they stopped the picture and he said hello Slim! Well he come out and introduced me to his boss and introduced me to a lot of his friends, of course I had a trapper's woodsman mind .. I didn't have a mind to make out who I met, I don't know. But Gladys said one of 'em of was Clark Gable, he brought some of out and introduced 'em to Gladys and Gladys said one of 'em was Clark Gable. But I don't know who the devil he introduced 'em to but a lot of 'em.

00:03:15

And we talked a little while and he said where ya goin' Slim. I said I'm goin' to Fresno. Why, he said I got a ... a cattle ranch up at the old Fort Millerton and he said I'm goin' up the day after tomorrow he said why can't ya come up to the ranch and see me? Well, old Fort Millerton was where I was born. Or right close. And I kinda wanted to see that too so I told 'em I'd come up. Well, I went up and seen 'em. And the first night there, why we stayed up till breakfast was about ready, ran an old trap line and keepin' the fire goin' in the lean-to at 40 below and we just had a swell time and talkin' things over, went for a swim in the river and boy we had a swell time. And again, he was way ahead of me. He had a young Jack Holt, a little younger than Jack was when I knew him but the same clean cut, fine lookin' kid that Jack was. You know Jack was an engineer. Little older than I, somehow, I seemed to always get ahold of ... in touch with fellas that was 3 or 4 older than I. Well Jack was a engineer. And ... but he had this boy that looked just exactly like Jack used to and the prettiest little daughter I ever seen about 15, 16, his son I think was 17 or 18 but he told me about how he come to get in the movies. That he just decided that Hollywood would be a good place to sell his fur so he took 'em there. And not wantin' to spend his money and bein' an engineer he got a job layin' some pipe. And he said before he got his pipe laid, why they come to 'em and wanted him to try out on the movies, which he did and that's where he went from that on [a few seconds of dead air].

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Now about them other fellas, Service and London and Beach.¹ I didn't know 'em really. I met Beach when he was writin' The Iron Trail but that was. But you know them fellas wasn't known then. Now Service at that time had done a little poetry, wrote a little, but not much so, they just really wasn't known to amount to anything. There was ... the people that had had made the big stake and all of that had ... was the ones that really knew ... really was known around the country. Now as far as what Dawson was like when I got there, of course it was a boom town, there musta been ... now you see it was ah, '98 and 1901 when I got there and then it was struck before that of course, and there was some cabins there. But when I got there in 1901, late, why it was quite a boom town. I dunno how many was there, I'd say maybe 3-4,000, course run it up to I think around 20,000 maybe more, at one time. Now Fairbanks was of course a new town. It was just a few cabins there, they was buildin' a little and ... a few ... just a small buildings, no big ones, the biggest one of course was the dancehall and gamblin' place and it was just made of rough boards and I think that was whipsawed lumber. Now I'm not sure. I dunno if you ever seen any of that whipsaw or not, but they gotta saw about 7 feet long. It's made just like a rip saw is made, with teeth all one way and you roll your log up on frame, about 7 feet high, it depends on the man's height, then one man gets ... they strike a line down the log where they wanna saw and fact they'll strike lines clear across the log if they wanna make inch lumber why they'd strike inch lines and just strike a line the length of the log or whatever they wanna make.

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And then they follow that with their saw, one man on the bottom and one man on the top. It's a devil of a job but a man ... two men can knock out about 200 feet of lumber a day and I believe the building they had there was whipsawed lumber because there was no mill. But it was just a ... a town just started. I don't think it's over a half a dozen log cabins built, some of 'em bein' built. That's the way those boom towns started. Nome was just about the same only I don't think there was over 5 or 600 men in either ... Nome or Fairbanks and they could got to be oh, maybe 20,000 towns but they would just started and when the town first started everything comes in first of course it's a saloon and then a dancehall and then a grocery store and that's how they start as quick as they can get their stuff in but it seems like the first thing they get in a barrel of whiskey. And, er, a gamblin' table or course, and really get into business.

00:08:53

Now as far as Sam McGee was concerned I knew him. Ah, I met 'em in Dawson, of course his cabin was in Whitehorse but I met 'em in Dawson and just got aquatinted with him. He wasn't any celebrity or anything but just an accident I met 'em I guess and he was from Tennessee and was just about Service describes in him, he was always kickin', everything was wrong, course he made a lot of money there and got out with a good stake then in '39 I see him again in the Whitehorse, course he's quite an old man there, I dunno whether he's livin' yet or not but I think he is and ... I haven't heard at least that he was dead but he lived in the Okanogan Valley in Washington state. He had an apple orchard here so I knew him pretty well but ... of course I knew Whitehorse Bill, ya knew him because he was a ... well made lots of noise when he come to town everybody know it because he would ... he would come in with a poke of nuggets and untie the string and scatter on the dancehall floor to watch the girls scramble for 'em. And, that was why everybody knew 'em. Now about the love life in Alaska. That was all kinds of girls come up there and some of them awfully nice girls, just kinda got into the business, now they had girls, well they had one girl they called Dolly The Virgin and everybody swears that she's absolutely virgin as far as they is concerned but they made lots of money. She made lots of money 'cuz everybody was

¹ Transcribers note: Robert Service, Jack London, Rex Beach.

always tryin' but ... there was girls of course that just come in strictly for business, they was a typical dancehall girl, typical girl just out strictly for money, most of 'em had a man that would help 'em along and coachin' 'em of course.

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Well there was kinds of men too. Now they'd be some men, not altogether young men, I've seem men that is almost [inaudible] come in with a poke of several thousand dollars and spend it just two or three nights, raisin' Cain and on some girl and think by gee they was win 'er in spite of the devil but they spend all their money. And then go back after some more of course. That was typical but a lot of 'em got married, lot of 'em got married and made awful good wives I know some of 'em of yet. And, they made some more with this wives, it was nothin' uncommon for a fella goin' out prospectin' to take a girl with 'em. We used to think you know that girl ... women had no business in Alaska at all but its altogether wrong, women take that country same as men and like adventure just as much and like the outdoors just as much, we found that out lately. Because today we go on way out someplace on the trap line or prospecting and we run into them just the height of culture, really cultured girls, that women. Now I've known women to be out with men like that and make a strike. Some of 'em say that most of 'em didn't, most of 'em was women and men that they'd go to town blow it [inaudible] together when their claim was gone when they was broke just the same. But you find 'em in all kinds of places, some of 'em even resorted to [inaudible] magazine and would write out and get 'em a woman. At the roadhouses why a man would have a roadhouse and he would be lonesome and maybe a woman would come along the trail and he'd stop her and go to work for 'em and there they'd be and they'd get to be partnerin' and maybe get married. And maybe a woman would have a roadhouse and some man come along she'd want help, she'd stop 'em and there they'd be. That was quite common and one other thing that was quite common was to go in the coast to say Fairbanks. Well you would see a couple goin' in maybe neckin', maybe they'd handle a horse, maybe they'd have a couple of dogs, you couldn't tell what, but it was a pretty good gamble that that woman would last, she got to Fairbanks or not.

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Goin' along the trail he'd didn't know anything about it and there was lots of men along the trail that knew all about it, they was right up on the ball, ready to go, ready to help, ready to do anything and about 10 to 1 you'd loose your wife before you got in [end of recording]