

Transcript Summary

UAF Oral History Call No:	2016-15-27
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:	February 7, 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 speaking mid-sentence] ... [inaudible] said to me, said how fast do they darn things go? And that's the first I remember really knew how fast a dog did he go. Well, now mind ya they drove up to the White House, drove around an hour and with that sled on wheels wasn't too light so they ... if they went anywheres too fresh and I said I don't know but he said I'm goin' clock 'em goin'

back. So, I got my dogs headed either way and he had his motorcycle out in the front, at that time they got kinda tamed down, wasn't so scared, and he had that motorcycle just a smokin' and when I yelled alright well why he just let tore all the gravel off of the sidewalk and headed back for camp. Well he told me I done 25 miles from the White House to the campin' ground, five blocks, that's the first clock I'd ever had on 'em. Well they wanted me to come back to the fair in '34 and be with Alaska exhibit and so I did and spent a lot of the winter in Washington, talkin' to everybody there about the highway and gettin' things all fixed up and when we got back to the fair of course that's where I met Gladys. [dead air from 00:01:15 to 00:01:19]

00:01:19

Well I was fixed up really nice because I was gonna stay all the summer and I had a really swell time. Again, I camped right in the ... grounds and had my campfire and we had quite a time, cookin' hot cakes and everybody stand around and watch me flip hot cakes and everybody come to see when I feed the dogs, and I had good place to eat and boy she was really a nice set up. But, course I wasn't too sure of what kinda trapper Gladys was gonna make and I was just wondering a little a bit about goin' back to Alaska and takin' her and about the middle of summer why they decided they wanted me to go to the fair in California. Well I wanted to see my folks out there too and so we decided we'd go out to the fair in California. [dead air from 00:02:19 to 00:02:24]

00:02:24

Well of course you pretty near know the rest of the story I think I sent it to ya, ah, but when I got my dogs to Washington they was not one of 'em had a bit of a sore on his feet which proves that the wolves was ... just got an awful good foot because the leader was a little tender but the wolves they just didn't have ... seemed to have a thing in the world wrong with their feet but you know they just never did get used to people. The leader did. He would come out to a quite a few people and visit with 'em and talk with 'em. Now of course the second year at the fair, why, [inaudible] got to be a good friend of the leaders and a couple of the other of 'um kinda made up with 'em but, everyday, never fail, once or twice he'd come over and see that dog and bring 'em ... somethin' to eat. I called my leader Rembrandt and he'd come over to see Brandt and pet 'em, and talk to 'em, and just about everyday he'd say well he says that dogs got more sense than about half the people at the fair, but he got so into in and he'd come you'd ... he'd be a ... a 30 feet from the pen and he'd say here I come Brandt and Brandt would jump up and he'd come as far as his rope and they would meet and have a good time. But that year, I ... Mrs. Hoover come to see me [inaudible] Hoover and Hoover.

00:03:58

And, of course, Harry S. New¹ brought them over and introduced 'em and ... Mrs. Hoover was awfully fond of the dogs. Oh, she admired them dogs and she said, oh, I would love to ride with them dogs and well then, I said, I'll tell ya whatcha do. If you'll come over in morning before fair opens, I said I'll take ya for a ride. She said, would you? Why I said sure I would I said you be over here before the fair opens. Well you know that they didn't allow any dogs in the fair and when she go over there they next morning, there was just nobody in the fair, few people, little bunch a standin' around you know and so I got her on my sled and started out. Well of course I went to braggin' what a ... a ... she marveled oh she says how well those dogs mind ya and I said oh, yes, they mind every word I said, they just ... they're trained that way and I went on braggin' about how well those dogs was trained and how they'd mind me every minute that I was out you know and I was out probably, oh, 25 or 30 minutes with her and we was just

¹ Transcriber's note: Harry S. New was the Postmaster General under President Hoover. Slim talks more about him in 2026-15-32.

havin' the best chat and the best time and a bunch a people we was goin' by and something happened. Hell broke loose and there was a dog and my do ... and I hadn't seen him but my dogs did and they had that dog and the people was among 'em screamin' and the dog was a yelpin' and devil to pay all around. Well I dropped my sled, I got up to stand on my brake and I'd run up and got hold of this darn pooch and got him outta the bunch and Lord, how he did get out of there. Boy, he just picked 'em up and put 'em down.

00:05:51

And got my dogs straightened out, well I was feelin' pretty silly I'm tellin' ya after braggin' to her like I did about how good my dogs mind me and then in that awful mess and ... got my dogs all straightened out and again and got back to the cabin and I was feelin' pretty sick and when we drove out, why Hoover was there and she yelled out oh she says, we had a dog fight and I had a very front seat. She just seemed to enjoy that dog fight as much as anything. [dead air from 00:06:22 to 00:06:27]

00:06:27

Here's the name of my dogs. Rembrandt was the leader of course, I call him Brandt for short. You just shortened up the name. I seldom named the dogs ... I got 'em in a team and then something prompted me to name him. But there's Rembrandt, Gypsy, Copper, Trombone, Frosty, Wrangel and Baldy. Baldy was a quarter wolf and a son of my leader and I aimed to make a leader outta him one day and I think he'd have made a dandy but I didn't need it. But one more and I can't think of it neither Gladys and I but we'll remember it. Now the reason we ... I come down between the Coast Range and the Rockies was on the account of the road of course. That's what I come out for, to find out a way to get a road. Well, MacDonald was a locating engineer and he was awful good one. And he'd been years in that county and knew the country awful well and he guessed of course that that was the best way to come and we found afterwards that it was much the best way because there's no muskeg but I come as close to the Coast Range as I could ... for one reason we figured there'd be less snow and there was. There was no place that I run into over 18 inches of snow. The reason was there was no muskeg on the count of the Japanese Current,² kept that warm, and another thing was that the mountains were high, the Coast Range, very high, I don't know what all of them was but plenty high.

00:08:06

And the winds for the coast from the Japanese Current would come over but they would come over so high that they didn't snow, so the snow was very light there which made it a lot easier on me and my dogs and everybody else. But that's the reason they get those chinooks over in Canada they ... over around Edmonton and over there, is that the wind comes off of the Japanese Current and it goes too high to light ... and it goes right on over the Coast Range and don't come into what they call the trough. That place between the Coast Range and the Rockies and besides that, it was pretty near a thousand miles closer than the way the build the highway. That route was picked out by MacDonald and myself and was called Number One. Well, by the time we got excitement over the highway why they had 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 and of course they built it as far away as they could possibly get in the worst place possible. Well, I'll switch onto another reel now and I'll think of that other dog's name one of these days. I'll switch onto another reel and turn this one off. [dead air from 00:09:26 to 00:09:40]

00:09:40

Well I was workin' in the App Mine in northern California and tryin' to get to be a miner and I guess a tramp kid, and it was a very rich mine and it was pockety, it was quartz but every once in while they'd

² Transcribers note: This is the Kuroshio Current also know as the Black Current or Japan Current.

run into a pocket and boy the gold there ... half as big as your thumb, just lots of it, it was very rich in spots, just in pockets. Well I was workin' with a kid that was a worse tramp I guess than I was because he kinda ... I knda figured him as a tramp and we was lookin' at that gold one day, of course now, he said, listen this gold ... I heard about gold mining in Alaska. He said let's go. Well all I needed was somebody to suggest somethin' to me and I was ready to go. So, we hailed out. Well we took our little bundle and not much money and bummed away from there to Seattle. Well in Oregon we stopped and worked a couple of weeks in a lumber camp. I was pretty fair with an axe, even as a kid because I been about raised with one.

00:11:00

And ... but when we got Seattle why he backed out. He decided he didn't want to go. Well I don't know if it's gold, I don't know what it was, I just wanted to go that is all. I got started. And everybody was talkin' Alaska, everybody was talkin' gold and of course one in a while you'd run across one that been there and he didn't like it but anyhow I decided to go. Well, I didn't know anything about boats. I didn't know anything about Alaska as far as that's concerned. So, I just went down, this tub was there and I asked the Captain how much it'd cost to go to Alaska and he told me \$31 dollars and I give it to 'em. Well he wasn't ... wanna ... wasn't gonna be ready to go for 4 days and so I got me a job washin' dishes to save my money and when the boat was ready of course I was ready. Well there about 30 of us kids on it, just a tub and boy what grub and what smell and everything. And the most excitin' was on the trip was ... he run into the mud once and had to wait to the tide comes in to get off and the engine quit once and we had to wait until he fixed that but, they sure was interesting and we'd catch fish and wasn't too bad but the morning of the 16th day, when I work up, somebody was sayin' we was in Alaska.

00:12:24

Well we'd been in Alaska quite a while but we was at our ... this was Valdez. Now I didn't know where we was goin' even. They said Valdez but I didn't know where Valdez was, I hadn't looked on the map. I mighta [inaudible] of them down as far as they're concerned. But everybody was goin' to Valdez because that was a ... a way into the interior. Well when I ... they didn't, they was building a wharf I believe but they didn't unload that boat on the water. A lighter come out to get us and the tide was out of course and I waited in mud to my knees to get ashore, and didn't even wait for breakfast because I figured breakfast wouldn't be no good anyhow and I don't know if they served it or not, I don't think they did, they'd ready to get us off. But anyhow about the first thing I seen in and me a hungry kid, a sign on a tent, all you can eat was for \$5. Well I frisked myself for \$5 and I found I only had a dollar and thirty cents so I went to work with this little sled, they gave me one of these Yukon sleds and rope around your neck, you know how they work, and I'd pull this full of stuff. He was a trader, he traded with the fellas comin' out. He bought what they had and then sold it somebody else going in. He bought it for nothin' and sold it for plenty of money, he really had a goldmine, but I worked 30 hours for that fella, neckin' [end of recording].