

Paul Taylor
NPS Skagway Oral History Project
Skagway, Alaska
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Interviewed by Karen Brewster

Karen Brewster: Today is December 3, 2009 and I'm Karen Brewster and here in Skagway for the Skagway Oral History Project for the National Park Service and interviewing Paul Taylor in his home here in Skagway and running the video camera is Stacey Carkhuff.

Paul Taylor: Well, welcome to Skagway.

Karen Brewster: Thank you, I've never been here before. To get started why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself? You were born and raised here in Skagway?

Paul Taylor: That's correct I was born here, I'm about as Alaskan as you can get. My father was stationed as a G.I. during World War II and he essentially never left. He loved Alaska, he loved the Yukon so following the war he went south for just a couple months and came back and never left. So I was born in Skagway, went to school in Skagway, got all my post secondary education at University of Alaska Fairbanks and I've lived most of my life in Skagway. I've had brief stints in Juneau and Omaha, Nebraska but mostly I've lived in Skagway.

Karen Brewster: And what was your father's name?

Paul Taylor: My father's name was Marvin Taylor.

Karen Brewster: Ok. And now, you have a long history of working on the railroad but you said he worked on the railroad before that.

Paul Taylor: He did, he worked during the war mostly on the docks and I know that he worked in Haines for a while; I know he worked in Whitehorse a while and he eventually transitioned over to the railroad from waterfront operations.

Karen Brewster: And now you've been a past president or are you current president of the railroad?

Paul Taylor: No, past president. Actually I started when I was in high school just doing part time jobs for the railway and I worked on maintenance away gangs when I was in high school. I ran a steel gang while I was in college.

Karen Brewster: What was that?

Paul Taylor: Well, we hired about 30 students from the University of Alaska, most of them from Lathrop Hall in the summer of 1971 and we laid all new rails from Skagway to the top of the hill at Whitehorse Pass, 20 miles. That was a good summer. From there I moved on to construction problems, division engineer, chief engineer, and my next step was vice-president of Alaska operations. At that point in its

history White Pass was expanding into petroleum operations and they had extensive operations in southeast Alaska and Haines, Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Craig. We had a tugging barge that provided barge service to smaller communities, logging camps, and canneries, that kind of thing so it was a much more diverse operation than it is now.

Karen Brewster: One of the things we're interested in the history of the railroad is it's changed functions. It started out for taking miners and freight and in World War 2 it was obviously critical in supplying up to the highway and now it's basically just a tourist railroad, right?

Paul Taylor: The railway has evolved continuously from its inception. It started off as just a railway and it grew to the riverboats, they had an airlines division. They ran air service from here to Dawson, Atla, they ran stage coaches, they ran dog sleds eventually they had a highway operation. They had a marine operation in later years flying between Skagway and Vancouver. They ran riverboats on the Yukon River. It has been a continual story of change as the economy as the economy in the Yukon changed. White Pass in most instances led the change with innovations, for instance with containers, container ships, with construction of the highway they moved into the highway freighting business and then starting in the late 70's it began to shrink. Now White Pass is right back to where it was when it started as a really a narrow gauge railroad operation, all the other divisions are no longer functioning and have been shut down for many years. So the company has almost come full circle and I believe just from what you can see and what I know of the economy and what can happen that maybe there's some room for maybe a resurgence of some of the enterprise that White Pass used to be involved in. At least I hope so.

Karen Brewster: So why do you think it expanded into all those areas?

Paul Taylor: Well, it was a growing concern it was a business operation and they saw opportunities to expand their business, to earn a profit, perform a service and just make the whole company the railway included, stronger. The operation of this company was no different than the drive behind the Canadian Pacific Railway or the Union Pacific Railway, or any railway at that time.

Karen Brewster: Now who was behind some of that innovation, talking about the container thing that they were sort of a first in using that method.

Paul Taylor: This is a tough country to operate in and White Pass as any company would was always trying to look at the most efficient way to handle freight because the supply lines in the north are so long and labor and fuel and any supply situation is very expensive up here. So they were always searching to find ways to make other product less expensive and containerization is one way to do that. They saw it early on and moved very rapidly to containerize the whole system in the mid 1950's. Starting first with little 8 foot by 8 foot by 8 foot cube containers and then later moving into larger 25 foot long containers.

Karen Brewster: Nowadays containers are on all the trucks, all the barges I didn't even realize that it started here.

Paul Taylor: White Pass was certainly an innovator, I can't say they came up with the original concept but they certainly put it into practice. With the ships White Pass did in fact build the first cargo vessel to handle containers exclusively. In other words the ship was built around the hull and containers where everybody else took older ships and modified them to carry containers. But the Frank H. Brown was a ship designed to handle containers.

Karen Brewster: You don't think a railroad company is associated with that kind of thing.

Paul Taylor: That's true but they did and did it very well and won awards for doing it.

Karen Brewster: Was there somebody specific in the company that was responsible for that?

Paul Taylor: You know, I don't know. Certainly of what I saw in White Pass in nowadays you could say it was a team effort so I don't know whose idea it was. I'm sure it was something that came from the operating division, probably heard from the trucking guy, rail guy, ocean guy, for sure that the ship would have been designed by marine architects so I don't think it was just one persons idea.

Karen Brewster: So what got you interested in working for the railroad?

Paul Taylor: Well in those days you couldn't grow up in Skagway and not have the rail be part of you. It still is for me, I mean I've still got two sons that work for the railway. It's just something that gets in you and it never leaves.

Karen Brewster: Tell me a little bit about some of the different jobs you had you mentioned starting in high school and building the rail in college. How did you advance in the system?

Paul Taylor: Well it was a steady movement, I left off I mentioned I was Vice President of operations of the petroleum operation and then later I moved to President of the railway operations and the railway operations only. The rail operation is probably the best story of White Pass. I think you all know that in 1982 White Pass completely shut down. The ocean division shut down, the two ships were tied up, the Frank H. Brown and the Klondike, the railway was completely shut down, almost all of the highway division was shut down, just portions of the petroleum division stayed in operation and it stayed that way until late 1987 when the railway was actually purchased by the Hogan Group. There was an agreement to sell the railroad in late 1987 there was a series of payments that were to flow from the Hogan Group to White Pass to consummate the sale and the payments were to start in the fall and were to end at the end of the year and my memories there were to be 4 payments. Well, the payments didn't happen, the first payment time grew and of course the payment wasn't made so it was essentially just moved to the next payment time for a doubling of the payment and that didn't happen. Finally at the end of the year the deal collapsed, there would be no sale of the White Pass rail division to the Hogan Group. So in early 1988 the management at White Pass, and I was part of it then, I was the Vice President, we decided to make one more try with the two major unions; the United Transportation Union and the Teamsters, to see if we couldn't find a way to re-open the railway on a limited operation for tourists much as you see it now. So early in the year, the White Pass team flew to Portland and we met with the United Transportation Union and in a matter of two days we came to an agreement with

them for their train crews to operate the railroad as a tourist operation so that left the Teamsters and we felt pretty confident we could come to agreement with the Teamsters. So we came back to Skagway and we arranged a meeting with the Teamsters in Juneau and we went down to Juneau a couple weeks later and met with them, think we negotiated another two days and we got hung up on a subject that was important to us, we had to have it and of course the Teamsters didn't want to give it up. It was a subject concerning special work rules and they just couldn't see it, they wouldn't give it up so we tried and we tried and we couldn't come to an agreement with them so we told them that we were sorry that we just couldn't do it and that we wouldn't open the railway. At the last minute...pause – cell phone rings.

Karen Brewster: So you were talking about your negotiations with the union.

Paul Taylor: When we left off we had traveled to Juneau and we negotiated with the Teamsters for a couple days and we got down to one major item, special rules, and we just we had to have it, Teamsters didn't want to give it up and so we decided that it was an impasse so we decided we wouldn't open the railway and we told them so. This was devastating but at the last minute the head of the Teamsters Union at that time and our chief negotiator, Harry Hoskins, stepped out in the hallway and they agreed to put the special rules in a drawer, that was a term, we put the rules in the drawer and we won't use them, they were there but we didn't use them. That's what sprung the re-opening of the railway in 1988 to become what it is today which is a major tourist attraction. I think it's the most popular shore excursion in the state of Alaska now. So there we were in the spring of 1988, it's one of those situations I think you've all been in it but you couldn't start anything because you might stop but you couldn't stay stopped because you had to start. It was really tough but we did, we pulled it off that year I remember very clearly we were budgeted and we planned to haul 70,000 passengers but we only hauled 35,000 and we knew right away we weren't going to do 70,000 but we were able to contain costs so we weren't hurt too bad but that's the way the railway got started in 1988.

Karen Brewster: And again, what inspired you guys to think about doing it as a tourist?

Paul Taylor: The railway had always been a tourist attraction and I think to a man we all knew there was potential for the railway to be if nothing else but a tourist haul. I think when you think, when you think of Skagway you think of Chilkoot Trail and White Pass Trail, Deadhorse Gulch. Very few people use the Chilkoot Trail, I think they're limited to 50 people a day but in the summer thousands of people see White Pass and Deadhorse Gulch and they just look at it, there's no impact. On the trail or the historic site whatsoever people just riding by it on a train looking. They're doing well over 400,000 passengers a year now and I think that's just fantastic.

Karen Brewster: So how does it work if you're a tourist and you come into Skagway and you want to go up the railroad, what's the process?

Paul Taylor: The usual process is to purchase your rail excursion through the cruise ship that you are on that you're traveling with, that's the most prevalent way that people purchase a ticket to ride the railway. You could always go to the railroad depot and purchase an independent ticket.

Karen Brewster: So it goes up the pass and turns around somehow and comes back?

Paul Taylor: That's one, that's the most popular one Skagway to White Pass Summit and return. Another very popular one goes to Frazier and back, about 8 miles further goes to Frazier at mile 28. And then they about 3 years ago opened a service to Carcross which is a long one, 67 miles.

Karen Brewster: And this may be a dumb question but originally did the line go all the way to Whitehorse?

Paul Taylor: Yes, the railway went to Whitehorse and it was operated to Whitehorse when the rail was shut down in 1982 but the rail has not been operated north of Carcross which is mile 67 since October 8th, 1982. The track is still there but it's...you can go get a Christmas tree from the center line of the track if you want to. It's really overgrown but it's there.

Karen Brewster: Now you said your educational background is as an engineer?

Paul Taylor: Yeah, I left Skagway and went to Fairbanks scared to death but I came home with a Masters Degree in Civil Engineering and I still love it. I still do the occasional work for the Institute of Northern Engineering. I just love going back there because there's just something about; the footfalls on the stairways still sound the same. I love it.

Karen Brewster: So you applied your Civil Engineering to the work on the railroad?

Paul Taylor: When I got out of school I went to work for Union Pacific Railway for a year and I worked on High Speed Curves in Wyoming which I just visited this fall, went back and took a look. Actually I worked between Evansville Wyoming and Marysville Kansas for most of one year and then I came back to Skagway and I worked for Alaska Department of Highway (DOT) to construct the highway from Skagway to the border and I was Assistant Project Engineer on the project from 1974 we completed the project in 1978. We started in the fall of 74, we just did a little tiny bit and in 1975 we got to the bridge site, actually a little bit beyond the bridge site. In 1976 we spent most of our time constructing the Captain Way/Mar Creek Bridge the road was advanced about a mile and a half. In 1977 we make it right to the Canadian border and finished up in 1978.

Karen Brewster: What inspired the idea to building the highway?

Paul Taylor: It was a big deal then and in those days you could either work for the construction of the Trans-Alaska pipeline but we also had this project in Skagway and I thought no, this is local this is mine I'll work here.

Karen Brewster: Why did they decide they needed to have a road?

Paul Taylor: Well there's been a cry and a need and an effort to have a road constructed out of here to connect up with the Alaska Highway ever since the Alaska Highway was built. Actually, you could say that the need was established with the use of the Chilkoot Trail and the White Pass Trail to get good

supplies into the Yukon. So there's always been a need, it just advanced to the status of a highway in 1974.

Karen Brewster: I'm wondering why when the army was here in World War II they didn't build a road, I mean they were building the Alaska Highway and Skagway was an entry point for some of that.

Paul Taylor: That's true, the Army essentially leased the railway, operated the railway during World War II. The Army constructed a road over a wagon road from Carcross to Whitehorse. They also built the road from Carcross going over to Jake's Corner in World War II and they of course built the Alaska Highway as you well know. So those were the highway contributions by the U.S. Army.

Karen Brewster: And I guess they didn't feel the need to build a road from Skagway because they had the railroad? (Odd skip in tape, may have missing something since it doesn't seem to flow)

Paul Taylor: It was doing ok, it was struggling but it was doing just fine.

Karen Brewster: When were you born?

Paul Taylor: I was born on January 3, 1949 at the railroad hospital here in Skagway.

Karen Brewster: I was curious what Skagway was like when the military came in and took over and you say they leased the railroad. That was before you.

Paul Taylor: I don't know from just what stories I hear, people mention, photographs and I've seen some historical records so that's what I know about it.

Karen Brewster: You said your father worked for the railroad?

Paul Taylor: He did.

Karen Brewster: And what did he do?

Paul Taylor: I think his first job with the railway was either as a Wharf Agent or maybe somewhere along the line he was a clerk for a short period of time but essentially moved from the Harbor, from the Waterfront Operation to rail operations. He was Asst. Superintendent, Superintendent, Vice President and eventually President of the Railway. He was there during the big years when there was very large expansion stemming from mining activity in the Yukon, both Cassiar and asbestos moving product from their Cassiar Mine from Clinton Creek and Keno Hill. Of course the big surge was the start up in operation Cypress Anvil Mine just north of Ross River Yukon which led to very large expansion of the railway and the waterfront. That's what sprung the construction of the war terminal here on the beach that was done in 1968-1969 that's when the 101 class automobiles were purchased and moved to Skagway, they bought 200 new steel flat cars, the White Pass highway division was expanded, I can't give you definite numbers, I didn't have anything to do with that but I knew there was huge expansion in highway division. The ore was put in containers and hauled on trucks to Whitehorse and at Whitehorse at the Yukon River the containers were transferred to the railroad. The railway hauled the containers to

Skagway; the containers were dumped inside the ore terminal for eventual loading onto handy sized cargo ships for mostly Asian ports.

Karen Brewster: That started in the late 60's you say?

Paul Taylor: That started fall 1969.

Karen Brewster: How long did that continue?

Paul Taylor: That went up until 1982.

Karen Brewster: I find what's so interesting about the White Pass is so many railroads in Alaska came into existence to support mining, copper River one, then out in Nome there were some little railroads that supported different mining operations and the mines stopped so the railroad stopped where White Pass has been able to keep itself afloat in these little operations and being one that actually transitioned into tourism.

Paul Taylor: That's true and where you are from, Fairbanks, there was extensive narrow gauge operation.

Karen Brewster: Yeah, the Tanana Valley one.

Paul Taylor: Yeah, right. And actually there was White Pass equipment, a locomotive and some passenger cars and maybe some flat cars moved over to operate on that railway. You are absolutely right when you think of the stark contrast between (odd blip in recording, seemed to skip with a pause and then jump ahead in conversation)...which was essentially a government railway was operated by the state now, operated by the federal government before that has received massive amounts of operating money and capital and you compare that to White Pass which has always been a private, privately owned, entrepreneurial company that has received minor amounts of government help and I'm thinking just a couple bull dozers and they were involved a locomotive purchase but it was nothing compared to the Alaska Railway or the British Columbia railway. So you compare what is going on in the railbelt of Alaska to what exists here in Skagway between Skagway and Whitehorse and it is a stark contrast, this is really a growing concern. It's a very rich operation, very profitable operation. We've all read recently where the Alaska Railroad really had to tighten their belt and lay some people off but if you compare the balance sheets of the Alaska Railroad to White Pass there's no question that White Pass is clearly superior to the Alaska Railroad in term of profitability for what they do as a railroad.

Karen Brewster: Does White Pass do any freight hauling anymore?

Paul Taylor: White Pass does not haul freight but I believe that there is freight in White Pass's future, I sincerely believe that. I think it's inevitable.

Karen Brewster: You'd have to cut the Christmas trees off the track.

Paul Taylor: Yeah. Well knowing White Pass they'll make the Christmas trees a profit center.

Karen Brewster: You say it's a private organization, how's it organized as a company and how has it changed over time since its private, how do they function organizationally and financially?

Paul Taylor: The function of the railway is really no different from a corner candy store. There's some upfront capital to get it started and there's operating revenues which is usually to pay down the opening capital and you have operating expenses that are deducted year from operating capital. It's really straightforward, especially in an operation like this where you can see it from one end to the other. If you look out this window you can almost see the top of the hill where it stops and comes back.

Karen Brewster: Who funded it originally though?

Paul Taylor: It was funded originally by English capitalists. Roy Mentor who was a vice president of White Pass wrote an award winning book, published by University of Alaska Press titled White Pass, it is a very detailed, very fascinating read on the history of White Pass how it starts with the English capitalists that you just mentioned, the story stops with the inauguration of rail service from Whitehorse to Skagway in 1900. Fascinating book if you haven't read it you really should read it. That'll give you something to do in Fairbanks on these dark nights.

Karen Brewster: So that first started in 1900, is when it?

Paul Taylor: They started construction late in the summer of 1898 and the railroad was completed to Whitehorse in mid-summer 1900.

Karen Brewster: At that point it carried freight and passengers.

Paul Taylor: It did.

Karen Brewster: Tell me a little bit more about working on construction for the highway, what that was like.

Paul Taylor: That was (another hiccup in the video-skipping ahead again)...young man. It was a very large tough construction project. I was on the engineering side of course. We had three, three man survey crews, of course we had a couple inspectors and the Project Engineer was Vern Hurst and I was Assistant Project Engineer. Our job was essentially to lay out the construction, survey the construction so we could measure how much rock was being moved so we could pay the contractor, build the bridge, the Captain Way/Mar Creek Bridge and just make sure the road was going the way that it was supposed to go. It was hard work, I mean it was hard just getting to work, especially for the survey crews. They weren't lowered from baskets but there were a couple of spots we did have to climb up using a rope, it was very difficult. When you went to work in the morning you worked long 10-12 hour days, day in and day out, we often worked 7 days a week. We built the road in 3 years, we built not quite 10 miles at that point it was a tough, tough job, but we always felt humbled because the railway, I mean the whole railway was built in three years and they didn't have the equipment that we had. We had all the biggest machines, we had something like 13 rock drills going all the time, almost every foot of the highway had to be drilled and shot out of granite rock, that rock up there is very, very hard. So while we were building

the highway we were always eclipsed by the goings on of the Trans-Alaska highway system but still this was a major feat of highway building.

Karen Brewster: For engineering.

Paul Taylor: Yeah.

Karen Brewster: You mentioned the granite but were there any troubling features that as an engineer you had to figure out how you were going to get this road in?

Paul Taylor: Actually to tell you the truth there was nothing really sexy about the engineering, we were using tried and true methods, we used pressured blasting techniques on blasting but really it was just hard work, that's what it was. We did it, there was a minor, well it wasn't minor claim for extra work but basically the job went well.

Karen Brewster: Four years to build how many miles?

Paul Taylor: It was 9.6 miles as I recall.

Karen Brewster: Is four years...

Paul Taylor: We really had it built in 3 years but we spent the last year cleaning it up and shaping it up.

Karen Brewster: And is that a...

Paul Taylor: It was pretty good for the train we were working on because there was absolutely no access, everything had to come from this end and you couldn't drive anything out there even to move the drills, you know the lead drills in front to make the smallest pioneer road we often had to go ahead and hand drill pins into the rock and then run cables to the pins and then cable the drills along to the pins so we'd have a place to work so we could anchor the drill down so we could just drill and shoot enough of a bench so we could start working and that happened in many places so it was slow, hard, hard work.

Karen Brewster: Sounds like a potential for on-the-job accidents.

Paul Taylor: That happened to a local, Jimmy Napp. On one of these moves when we were trying to move a drill and trying to set one of the pins, something slipped and the drill came down on him.

Karen Brewster: Did he lose his leg?

Paul Taylor: Yes he did.

Karen Brewster: That's tragic. I'm sure on the construction of the railroad that may have happened even more.

Paul Taylor: It did, there were multiple railroad deaths, there are three men underneath a rock near mile 10 Black Cross Rock, it is pointed out to the tourists as they go by on the tourist trains but the rock was too big to move so they just left it, that's their memorial.

Karen Brewster: What else am I not asking you about in terms of your work with the history of the railroad that you can think of?

Paul Taylor: Let me think of some antecedents.

Karen Brewster: Let's take a pause here. So we were going to talk about the narrow gauge and apparently there are reports that building narrow gauge is cheaper.

Paul Taylor: There are reports and there are statements made about, it's far cheaper to build and construct a narrow gauge railway as opposed to the construction of a standard gauge rail and only a small portion of that statement is true. When you think about let's talk about constructing right-of-way through a side hill or maybe a cut or a fill, it is only the difference in the width of a narrow gauge railroad and a standard gauge railroad that comes into play, the fill slopes are the same for a narrow gauge and standard gauge and that's where the bulk of the cost is incurred when you build fills or you have to build cuts for narrow gauge or standard gauge. So when people say that narrow gauge is much cheaper to build you can go around sharper curves. That's not necessarily totally true only a small portion of it is true. What completely takes away from that is that the cost of narrow gauge railroad is much higher than a standard gauge railway and that subject comes up quite often now especially when you think about the resurgence of widening in the Yukon is can the railway haul freight again? Well, yeah, but what should it be? Should it be containers on narrow gauge or should it just be some form of a standard gauge? I've always been a proponent of standard gauge and actually when the railway came back into service in 1988 all the capital improvements were for eventual conversion to standard gauge; we bought 8 foot ties, bought heavier rail, heavier switches. When we improved doorways at the shop we always made sure they were suitable for standard gauge and then I know for a fact that the guys building this railway were building a heavy railroad. They were building it for either super heavy narrow gauge or standard gauge. For instance, the bridge at Carcross, the wood bridge there, that bridge is high enough where you could take double stacked container cars under it right now if you wanted to do that. I don't think a single person in the Yukon is aware of that, but you can do it. There are many 16 degree curves on this rail; you can achieve a 16 degree curve with standard gauge. The layout of the rail especially between Carcross and Whitehorse is superb and you can see if you take detailed examinations, if you make a detailed examination of the layout of the railway you can see where they were holding a nice grade or a nice tangent or nice curve then they would bunch any error they had into a short little period to make it easier for someone to come in behind and fix. It's just as plain as day what those men were thinking and so when you think about the timing of the railway construction which is 1900 that was about 20 years after it was generally recognized in the United States and Canada that it was much wiser to construct standard gauge railway than narrow gauge. They knew then that they'd built enough narrow gauge that there was obvious increase in cost with the operation of a narrow gauge that made the consideration to build standard gauge much more attractive to someone putting up capital and someone who would have to live with the operating costs of a narrow gauge. Actually, it was the

inherent burden and inefficiencies of narrow gauge that contributed quite a bit to the shutdown of this railway in 1982. It wasn't the whole reason but it was a very important reason, enough that during the five and a half years it was shut down anything that we did here was for eventual conversion to standard gauge.

Karen Brewster: So why do you think they built it as a narrow gauge?

Paul Taylor: I think it was because they had English men putting up the money and it was the English that were really stuck on what they say cape gauge, which is 42 inch gauge, 3 foot 6 inches, and I think that the promoters of the railway Graves and others had to travel back to England and make the pitch that building this railway was possible. So I think in order to keep their argument as whole as possible and not to introduced anymore risk into their promotion or presentation as possible, I think they acquiesced to the notion that it should be narrow gauge. When you look at the bridges that they built, when you look at the alignment of the railway and when you look at the size of the cuts and the fills, the tunnel clearances those guys were thinking standard gauge and every one of them had been involved with construction of standard gauge lines in the United States and Canada. I believe it and I know it, I know that they were thinking something beyond just a light narrow gauge railway.

Karen Brewster: And so you just said the dimensions on the, what's the term?

Paul Taylor: Cape gauge.

Karen Brewster: Cape gauge, is that standard narrow gauge, or not standard?

Paul Taylor: No, well, well there's 36 inch gauge, narrow White Pass gauge and then there's cape gauge which is 42 inch gauge. Between White Pass and cape gauge is meter gauge and you have standard gauge which is 4 feet 8 ½ inches, Russian railways are 5 feet and there are some other gauges but those are the principally gauges.

Karen Brewster: Or it's like in Australia where each territory or district they switch gauges so trains couldn't go all the way across the country.

Paul Taylor: Exactly and then whenever you pick up a railway magazine now you can always see that they're trying to convert most everything to standard gauge. Whenever they have the opportunity to convert to standard gauge they do.

Karen Brewster: So why did you not ever convert this one to standard gauge?

Paul Taylor: Part of what you're selling is history but the history is mixed, you have the Soapy Smith 1898 gold rush history, you've got steam engine history, locomotive history with the diesel locomotives and there's a couple are you talking 1950's or 1970's locomotives or the 1898 passenger cars or the passenger cars that were built here in the last few years. There's a multitude of timeframes when you think about the railway. Narrow gauge is part of that, it was originally constructed as narrow so there's no doubt that there is a marketing component to the operating of a narrow gauge but we'll see what the future brings.

Karen Brewster: You said when you were President that you wanted to convert it.

Paul Taylor: There was pretty much a consensus that the future of the railway would be standard gauge but you have to remember that was twenty years ago and the men making those decisions had just been through the shutdown. Part of the reasoning for the shutdown was based upon the inherent inefficiencies of narrow gauge and that's why there was no question, we just did it, everything we did was, we didn't say anything, but we were preparing for eventual conversion to standard gauge.

Karen Brewster: What were some of the other reasons for the shutdown?

Paul Taylor: Oh, there were. There were some management issues; I mean management made some decisions that probably shouldn't have been made. There were high costs here, they were higher than usual labor costs, and then the railway had been purchased by a much larger company that was more interested in trucking than a railway. So the trucking company being the superior company diverted much traffic to trucks over the Alaska Highway rather than use the containership rail connection to Whitehorse; that cost a lot. The major mine, the Cypress Anvil Mine shipping lead and zinc through the port shutdown so a major customer was lost, so we had the combination of those things plus the general whole economy shut down, the national economy slowed way down then and so those were the principal reasons the railway suspended operations on October 8, 1982.

Karen Brewster: You mentioned the different locomotives which was something I was thinking about the efforts to maintain the steam locomotives and restoration of some of these older engines, can you talk a little bit about that?

Paul Taylor: Well, starting from newest to oldest, there was a single locomotive that was built in I believe, 1974. There are eight 101 class locomotives that were built in 1969 and then again in 1972 and you have the 90 class locomotives that were started to be delivered here in Skagway in 1954, that is the fleet that they are rebuilding now. The 73 was built in 1947, that's a steam engine, and then they have a second steam engine the 69 and I don't know when that was built but Carl Mulvihill can tell you exactly. So that sort of gives you a time span of say the historic aspect of the motor power fleet of the railroad.

Karen Brewster: And all that restoration work has gone on here locally?

Paul Taylor: Most of it has. The latest work is being done outside in Washington State.

Karen Brewster: And Carl Mulvihill's been actively involved in that?

Paul Taylor: Well, Carl Mulvihill you're going to see him later, he'll know exactly what date the 69 was built and he Carl's family is also a very long-term railroad family and he'll be able to tell you lots of stories. He's much more of a historian than I am.

Karen Brewster: So they're not using an old restored steam locomotive from 1900?

Paul Taylor: No. No, but there is one here, the 52, the claim is it was the first steam engine in Alaska, maybe the first steam engine on a common carrier railroad in Alaska. You've seen many photographs of it, it is here, it's up at the shop but I don't think they have plans to restore it.

Karen Brewster: So the shops, what happens at the shops, I hear about "the shops"?

Paul Taylor: Oh, that's right up here just north of 23rd Avenue where all the maintenance performed on the rolling stock on the locomotives.

Karen Brewster: They build their own railcars as well?

Paul Taylor: They have, they've constructed passenger cars, they've constructed lowboys, they've constructed their own flat cars.

Karen Brewster: It sounds like the railroad is a big employer in Skagway.

Paul Taylor: Oh it is. It is. It's a very good employer, if you have a railroad job that's something worthwhile, even now, even seasonally.

Karen Brewster: I'm wondering, what it's meant to Skagway to have that railroad here historically through time as an employer and what it meant to the town when it shut down?

Paul Taylor: The railway was the bedrock of Skagway until it shutdown in 1982 and then there was a pause. Just about the time the railway essentially collapsed the park service came in, tourism took off like a rocket leading to the eventual return of the railway until now the railway is, I don't know if you could say it's the dominant industry in town, maybe it is, it's very close but certainly it doesn't play the role that it nice did but it's still a very-very important feature of Skagway being principal employer, economic driver for Skagway and the region. I mean, it is the most popular shore excursion in the state of Alaska.

Karen Brewster: So growing up here then it was a railroad town.

Paul Taylor: Oh, definitely a railway town.

Karen Brewster: And what does that mean?

Paul Taylor: Well, it means that in those days there were large groups of men working on the dock transferring freight, there were large groups of mostly men working at the shops on maintenance and they had many train crews. In those days there were train crews and there were groups. Even though there were divisions between the locomotives and the cars there was a camaraderie in the car shop and a camaraderie in the locomotive side and with the machinists and the bridge and building crew and the maintenance away guys. That extended from the workplace to the various clubs in town before, I remember when TV first came to town so the entertainment after work was with the people that you worked with during the day and it was very different and in some ways it was very-very nice. Very different fabric to the community then to what it is now.

Karen Brewster: So what is it like now? How's it different?

Paul Taylor: Now I would say Skagway is really, there are two Skagway's. There's a summer Skagway and a winter Skagway, where in those days it was a more cohesive because it was pretty much the same, how do I want to say it, the social life was more level. The school was more active, there were more kids in school. More community-based, more how do I want to say, more volunteerism if you will, there was more, the community I would say was tighter then. It was a closer community then I think.

Karen Brewster: Were their differences between management vs. the workers in the railroad?

Paul Taylor: Yeah, there were, that was always, yeah there was always a line there management vs. workers. It wasn't extreme, I mean we're talking pretty much the World War II generation but there was a difference, it was not extreme, it was a railroad the railroad is a little military like, everybody has duties and you know what to do there are safety rules and operating rules that you just, you live by the rules period or you don't work on the railroad.

Karen Brewster: Was it a company town in the sense of some other company's where the store and you used chits you didn't get paid and you lived in company housing, was Skagway like that?

Paul Taylor: Yeah, when I was growing up we went to the commissary and I think it was in an Army barracks around 2nd Avenue, Eddie Fairbanks will tell you exactly but we would go to the commissary and it was just a typical Army barracks and I still remember the layout of the store and I remember when I was old enough when my mother would send me to the store on my own. Eddie Fairbanks' mother would give me, they would get these big bologna rolls and she would slice the bologna and if you happened to be there at the right time, when she came to the end of the bologna roll, she would give you the little end of the bologna roll, I still remember that. So, yeah, I mean, it was one story no wait actually there were two stores; there was the commissary and then Herb Ruley had a supermarket on Broadway.

Karen Brewster: Did you pay with company money?

Paul Taylor: You know that system was in place but I didn't do that. Paying on account then was that was prevalent but I didn't do it.

Karen Brewster: You mention being born in the railway hospital so they ran the hospital in Skagway?

Paul Taylor: Yeah, they did, the railway operated the hospital it was located over where the blue clinic is now it was a two story building. The railway hired the doctor and I'm sure the railway paid the nurses, it was a community hospital.

Karen Brewster: An outsider not so familiar with the area I never thought of Skagway as a railroad town, that's not the reputation that kind of its gold rush that people tend to think of here. It's interesting to think of how much a railroad controlled place it was.

Paul Taylor: You know, I wouldn't use control like the hospital, you never thought of it as a company hospital the doctor was there and he was your doctor but it was the railway owned the building, the railway paid for the heat and electricity, everything worked, it was ok. You know for its time I would have to say you got a higher level of health care then with the doctor, now this is comparable time to time than you do now because at least in those days you had a doctor.

Karen Brewster: And now you don't.

Paul Taylor: We do not. But times are different expectations now. I mean women had their babies here, now you don't you don't even think about it, you have to go outside.

Karen Brewster: When we started, as you said, I grew up in Skagway couldn't help but go into the railroad business.

Paul Taylor: Yeah, that was sons followed fathers, that's the way it was, not for everyone but that was a very typical path and it was fine for the railways in the 70's and 80's the national railways got away from that but now it's coming back where the family tradition is welcomed into the railroad. I think that's the same in pretty much any industry whether it's tugboats shipping or airline business but when you're in a small community I think it's more noticeable.

Karen Brewster: So do you feel? How do you feel your father was an influence on you?

Paul Taylor: You know I knew from working on the railway that I wanted to be an engineer because in those days the railway hired consulting engineers to come out and do various things and when I was in high school it was sometimes my job to get them up and down the railway on a track car. I knew that's what I wanted to be and I still remember this very clearly one day a recruiter from the University of Alaska came to school and he played a little 8mm or 16mm film and the film showed the campus and I thought ok, I'm going to Fairbanks, and I did.

Karen Brewster: Your father coming home every night from working at the railroad and telling stories, did that influence you or?

Paul Taylor: Well yeah and you hung out with all the boys, their fathers worked for the railway in one way or another. When I think of the members of my class, some of which are still here, umm Wayne Summer his father was a painter, Sigh Dennis father worked as a long shore man, Craig Post's father was a master mechanic, Charlie Mason's father was a machinist and the same with the girls, Jackie Lee's father was a dispatcher, Marsha Berry's father was a locomotive engineer, Bonnie Farrough's dad ran the hotel, the Sourdough but he also worked for the railway later on, Margie Coffee's father worked for the railway, they pretty much all worked for the railway.

Karen Brewster: So you mentioned the hotel was that owned by the railway?

Paul Taylor: No, that was owned by Bill Farrough.

Karen Brewster: In Denali Park for a long time the Alaska Railroad went through and they owned the hotel there and certainly in lower 48 and Canada that's the case.

Paul Taylor: Well, you know, this railway did that but they didn't do it quite that way. For instance this railway owned the large hotels in Atlin because this railway had a little three mile shuttle from Scocia Bay to there was another port there in Lake Atlin, the riverboats couldn't get to Atlin directly so they would have to shuttle over this little using a 3 mile long railway. The railway built the Atlin Hotel and it operated the riverboats on both sides, operated the short run from the hotel in Atlin over to the railway and used the railway to get on the too shy to go into Carcross. I don't know if the operated any other hotels, that's the only one I know of.

Karen Brewster: Interesting how it all gets connected.

Stacey Carkhuff: Three minutes left.

Karen Brewster: I have one more question which is about this railroad went into Canada and what having that railroad meant for building relationships and connections between the US and Canada?

Paul Taylor: When I was growing up going to Whitehorse wasn't a big deal, you just did it. They were our neighbors. There was a customs officer, he was first at White Pass station and then he lived at Carcross and you went through customs but it was no big deal, it was like going to your neighboring town. For instance our basketball team would go play the Whitehorse basketball teams, if you had dental work you'd go to Whitehorse, sometimes you'd go there for medical and in order to drive the Alaska Highway you'd have to put your car on the train and go to either Carcross or Whitehorse to drive the Alaska Highway so it was just the next town down the road we never think about going in to Canada.

Karen Brewster: Is it still that way?

Paul Taylor: Now it's a little more formal but it's still, I still now the guys at the border and my sons Matthew, my youngest son Matthew was going to school at University of Alaska Fairbanks and he was coming home about four years ago he was coming from Fairbanks to Skagway at Christmas time and he pulled up to the Canadian customs station at Beaver Creek so he rolled his car window down and handed the person his passport and the inspector says hmmm you look a lot like you're dad, so it was that small.

Karen Brewster: I think that's another unique thing about this railroad is that it provided those connections between two countries.

Paul Taylor: It did and still does and I hope it'll do more.

Karen Brewster: Ok, we're about out of time on this tape, Stacey do you have more questions that you want to ask?

Stacey Carkhuff: Not really.

Karen Brewster: Do you have something you want to talk about I haven't asked, we can just switch tapes.

Paul Taylor: If I think of more I'll just contact you.