

ORAL H.I. STORY,
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Paul Taylor
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Skagway, AK
Skagway Oral History Project

- **Paul:** Born on January 3, 1949, and raised in Skagway, attended the University of Alaska Fairbanks for his degree in civil engineering. Vice President of Alaska operations of White Pass petroleum operations.
- **Changes in the White Pass Railroad:** The railroad evolved continuously- started out with just railway, then added on riverboats, stagecoaches, planes, marine operations, dog sleds. Late 1970 the W.P. RR began to shrink. Presently the W.P. is in operation as a narrow gauge, but all other divisions are no longer functioning.
- **Expansion of W.P.:** Business opportunities, make railroad stronger
- **People involved in innovations:** The long supply lines were very expensive, so the W.P. RR created containerization in the 1950's. The Frank H. Brown freighter was designed to carry containers on water. It was a team effort to evolve the shipping industry.
- **Paul's interest in the railroad:** Growing up/living in Skagway, one had no choice but to be involved with the railroad in some way.
- **The 1982 shutdown:** In 1982 the W.P. RR shut down, along with all other branches. In 1987 the W.P. RR was purchased by the Hogan Group, but payment schedules were not met. In 1988, (Paul was the Vice President) the railroad was re-opened for tourism. Harry Hoskin stood up for the W.P. RR along with the UTU teamsters and created a tourism oriented railroad.
- **Tourism with the W.P. RR:** The railroad had always been a tourist attraction. It now has around 400,000 passengers per year. The process of tourism- people would purchase W.P. RR tickets through a marine ship. They would then board the train to White Pass and back, Frasier and back, Carcross and back. The railroad has not operated north of Carcross since 1982.
- **Paul's education and work background:** Degree in civil engineering from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, worked for Union Pacific for 1 year. Worked for AK DOT (Klondike Highway) from 1974-1978.
- **Father worked for W.P. RR:** Father was a wharf agent/clerk. Went from the harbor to the RR. Was the assistant superintendent, superintendent, Vice President, President of W.P. RR.
- **Mining in the Yukon:** From 1969-1982 the RR was used to haul ore from the Kassiar, Keno, Ross River mines. 101 class locomotives hauled ore in containers to Skagway, then went on ships to Asian ports.
- **W.P. RR stayed afloat:** W.P. RR is a private owned company (unlike the AK RR or the BC RR). The W.P. RR is a very profitable operation, far superior to the Alaska Railroad. The W.P. RR has always used upfront capital operating money, a straight forward operation. The W.P. RR was originally funded by English capitalists. Construction on the W.P. RR was started in the summer of 1898, and finished mid summer of 1900.
- **Klondike Highway construction:** It was a large, tough project with rough work days. The road was built in 3 years, and was a major piece of engineering through granite and harsh terrain. A local man, Jimmy Knapp was killed in an accident during the highway construction. Many deaths were incurred with the W.P. RR construction.
- **The narrow gauge railroad:** Reports on cost: only a small margin of savings on width of the track only. The fills and cuts are the bulk of the expense in RR building. There are some inaccurate accounts of narrow gauge being much less expensive: not true. Currently, everything except the rails and undercarriages of the W.P. RR are converted to standard gauge. This was done in 1982. The reason the W.P. RR was designed as a narrow gauge is because the financial support was coming from England, and England supported the narrow gauge railroad. There are

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many different gauges all over the world.

- **Reasons for W.P. RR shutdown:** Management decisions, labor costs, the W.P. RR was sold to a company that favored trucking, Cypress Anvil Mine shut down, national economy slowed.
 - **Different locomotives:** 101 Class (1969-1972), 90 Class (1954)- being re-built currently, 73/69 steam engines- most restoration is taking place locally in Washington. Was the 52 the first steam engine in Alaska? (at shops in Skagway).
 - **The Shops:** North of 23rd ave in Skagway. All maintenance performed on rolling stock locomotives. Railroad is a large and good employer in Skagway.
 - **Railway's impact:** The W.P. RR was the bedrock of Skagway until it shut down in 1982. Then, when tourism blew up it returned as a principal employer. Skagway is and was a "railroad town." Mostly men worked on the railroad, train crews, dock yard, waterfront. There was a camaraderie among the workers- they spent time together outside of work. Now there are "Two Skagways"- summer and winter. In the past, people were more active with the school, did more volunteer work. The community was tighter.
 - **W.P. RR amenities:** The RR was military-like. It had a commissary, and a W.P. RR funded hospital. It is now a community hospital. W.P. RR also had a hotel in Atlin, Yukon. Scotia Bay to lake Atlin Port shuttle. There was a 3 mile long railroad.
 - **Families in the W.P. RR:** Sons followed fathers in Skagway in the 1970's and 1980's, but the national railroads got away from family tradition. Paul's father influenced his choice of being an engineer. He knew he wanted to be a RR engineer when a recruiter from UAF came to Skagway and spoke about engineering.
 - **U.S./Canada relations:** The customs were not a big deal when Paul was a child. Now they are, and they are more formal but still friendly.
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