

Carl Mulvihill
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Skagway, AK
Skagway Oral History Project

- **Carl:** Born in Skagway at the White Pass hospital in 1938. His dad was a White Pass conductor, his mother was a nurse at the White Pass hospital. It was fun growing up in Skagway- it was a small, safe community. There were lots of outdoor activities such as camping around Skagway.
- **The Mulvihills and the White Pass:** The Mulvihill family has been associated with the W.P. RR since 1900. His family was associated with the RR when the tracks still ran down Broadway street. The tracks were re-routed off Broadway during WWII. Carl discusses the old W.P. RR building (now owned by NPS) and talks about the military presence in Skagway in 1942-43. There was a USO building, an Army "tent city within the city." The RR was leased to the Army during WWII, and it was a very confusing time. The Army took over big-time and there were thousands of WWII soldiers everywhere.
- **Working for the W.P. RR:** Carl started working for the W.P. RR commissary grocery store. He then moved to working on the section track, then RR car shops, then trained baggage man. During the summer he was in college he worked as a train dispatcher, served with the military, then chief train dispatcher, then chief clerk. Skagway was a real railroad town. Carl notes, "The things you learned at work, you learned for life."
- **Container freight service:** In 1965, 25' containers were designed by the Matson Line. 25 tons could be put in the containers. This was when the RR was changing from steam engines to diesel. The Anvil Mine in Yukon Territory required ore containers, then the ore was loaded to trucks and moved to warehouses, then to ships to move it all over the world. Transferring the heavy containers involved using gantry cranes, which dropped the containers from trucks onto the ships. They also used the mobile strato-carrier. Before cranes, they used fork lifts. Post 1965, there was one freighter ship every Monday morning to Whitehorse. It would transport lead zinc ore, asbestos from the Kassair Mine.
- **Locomotive history:** 1954 G.E. 800 horse power electric generator with diesel engines were designed for the W.P. Narrow gauge. There are different gauges all over the world. The gauges' creation were at the whim of the engineer. Railroads used to not connect and it didn't matter. Then standard gauge was developed to help solve this problem. Russia's railroad has a 5' gauge.
- **Steam Engines:** All the steam engines in Skagway were second hand. They came available when the lower 48 began standardizing their railroads. The W.P. bought steam engines for cheap. In 1899 Skagway got brand new engines, in 1900 they placed another order for trains. The 3.9% grade of the W.P. RR limits the tonnage of the trains. They acquired a 10 wheeler, or a train helper locomotive, the 2-8-0 in 1938. The Mikado 2-8-0 "70 class" locomotive was built in 1938-39. Post WWII steam engine companies went out of business and switched to diesel.
- **White Pass is a challenging route:** The train engines were barged up to Skagway, unloaded with cranes onto the barge ramp, and the train tracks were built to the beach. The early railroad experienced constant turnovers of men headed to the gold fields, and because manual labor was extremely challenging.
- **Upgrading and changing locomotives:** Restoration- the 1908 was restored, and is now in action. Union Shops in Skagway; to work there, you had to be part of the union. You had to possess skills to make parts for steam engines, different cars. The depressed center cars were designed to fit through tunnels, and had a generic design. They were rebuilt in WWI and sent back to Skagway for finishing. The life expectancy of steam engines was around 30 years- it depended on the mileage, hours run. The narrow gauge steam engines had to be custom built

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because they had smaller engines.

- **Train dispatcher:** The train dispatcher designed a particular train according to freight, schedule, direction (north or south) to meet. Logistics of operating the train design was important.
- **Chief Clerk:** Administrative person for the railroad. (Carl worked as a CC). Paid bills, ordered supplies, did miscellaneous work. A "paper pusher." People moved through jobs to the top often, throughout a career. Change is good.
- **Yakutat Southern Railroad:** Hauled fish from fishing boats to canneries to be shipped out. Owned by Libby McNeal around 1910. The railroad ended in the 1950's. There was a lot of fish then, and the railroad was the most efficient way of moving it at the time.
- **White Pass the first AK railroad:** It was a common carrier- it was designed to haul freight for anyone, anywhere, and also people. It was built for the gold rush for freight and heavy mining equipment. It was the most efficient way of moving materials. The W.P. has remained in business for so long because they are innovative. The management is efficient- they bought out riverboats and other carriers to operate as one monopoly. In 1982 the W.P. shut down- the primary mine it serviced went bankrupt, and caused the W.P. to shut down. It has since re-opened for tourism.
- **5 eras of the W.P. RR:** The gold rush, WWII-army operations, post war modernizing in 1950's, mines in the Yukon and containerization in 1969, shut down and re-start of the W.P. (1982/1988)