

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF JOHN JACKSON

CONDUCTED BY KAREN BREWSTER

IN DAYTON, WYOMING

MAY 3, 2019

ORAL HISTORY 2017-01-100

KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH SENSENIG

[00:00:00]KAREN BREWSTER: This is Karen Brewster, and today is May 3, 2019, and I'm here with John Jackson in his home in Dayton, Wyoming. And this is for the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Oral History Project. So John, thank you.

JOHN JACKSON: Certainly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, letting me come visit you today. And why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself before we get into your work with the park.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, I came to Skagway in 1975.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, to teach fifth grade and be the wrestling coach.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

JOHN JACKSON: And I arrived on the ferry in August of '75, and um, was met at the ferry by the superintendent of schools, Dusty Mills. And uh, he gave me a tour of the town and the school, and I actually spent the first night with he and his -- he and his wife in their home.

[00:01:01]And then uh, I was -- had a little trouble finding a place to live.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Which is --

KAREN BREWSTER: Even back then?

JOHN JACKSON: Even back then. It wasn't nearly as bad as it is today, but.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, my first apartment was in -- in the White House.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: When Nova and Wanda Warner were the proprietors.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And um, from there -- so the school year started out and went quite well. We had -- I don't reme -- I had twenty kids in fifth grade. And the school at that time was the old building on -- now demolished. It was on -- between 11th and 12th on -- right off of State Street. Between State and Alaska. And um --

[00:02:02]KAREN BREWSTER: So where did you come from originally?

JOHN JACKSON: I grew up in Iowa. Moved to Colorado Springs when -- in the middle of my senior year of high school. So graduated from high school in Colorado Springs. Went to college in Gunnison, Colorado, Western State, and came away five years later with a -- with a elementary education degree. And, let's see, I student taught in Colorado Springs, and uh, did a -

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- so I taught in the fall of '7 -- student taught in the fall of '72. Was able to get a -- a sub teaching job in that same school in the third grade that spring, '73.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And then, uh, that summer, I was actually working in Nebraska for my uncle, leveling land and eating a lot of dirt. Um, so I was able to secure a teaching job in Walden, Colorado, in North Park, about sixty miles south of Laramie. And I taught there two years, and then my sister and brother-in-law at the time were headed for Alaska. And I says, "Oh, I'll just come along." And so, I was able to get a teaching job in Skagway on the way.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Interviewed over the phone with Mr. Mills in Oregon, I think. And um, he says, "Come on up." So we rode the -- drove to Prince Rupert and took the ferry to Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: They -- their teaching gigs were in Wrangell.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: So they got off there, and I went on ahead to Skagway. [00:04:05]And uh, so um, taught two years in the Skagway School and decided it wasn't for me. And the park was opening in the spring of '77.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And I was able to get a job as an interpreter/relief ranger. So that was the -- of course, those were days when all the buildings that the park now owns, um, were in real poor shape.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Falling into the ground, and leaning and -- And one of those buildings was the old railroad depot, which was on the corner of 2nd and Broadway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Where the visitor center is now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, in those days, it hadn't -- it was -- it had been abandoned for years, so they set up a visitor center in the -- what is now the reception area of the depot. And they had a little office in the corner, which I believe must've been a dispatch office at one time.

[00:05:22]But at the time we were there, the floor was settling and particularly in the office area in that corner was settling real bad, and so it was pretty rustic. But they had blown up -- as far as interpretive, um, tools, there were a series of big black-and-white photos from historic Skagway on the walls, which we led people around and talked to them about.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And they had a curious collection of two or three white audio chairs. You sit in the chair, and you'd be surrounded by this plastic shell. And it was recordings of, I think Steve Hites, who's now a successful tour operator in Skagway. He's also a musician, and uh, was at that time, working on the railroad and -- and writing songs and singing them. And so, a recording of his songs were in those chairs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

[00:06:40]JOHN JACKSON: Um, that was pretty much the extent of the -- well, we had a movie we could show. It was behind this black Visqueen curtain in an area that's now in the -- in the current depot is now -- There's an open area, um, just east of the visitor center.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

JOHN JACKSON: But now, it's enclosed. Of course, now they have a theatre.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: At that time, that open area was covered, and that was our theatre. I don't remember the movie we showed. Um, but at any rate, there were that first summer -- Dick Hoffman was the superintendent. He's the one that hired me. We had four interpreters, and on the Chilkoot there were two -- two rangers. Um, now wait a minute. No, there was -- there must've been four. But at any rate, once a -- once a month, one of us would get to go up on the trail and stay at Sheep Camp and give the rangers days off. So that was a treat. We'd get to hike up to Sheep Camp and man the station and do what we could with the hikers. And patrol the summit every day. Then we'd walk out to Bennett and take the train home at the end of our week.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, you didn't hike back down?

JOHN JACKSON: No. No. Um, so that was -- that was a treat. Um, great job. And so, in addition to the, um -- to that building, the old railroad depot building, there was, of course, um, the Lynch & Kennedy building. There was the Mascot. All the nicely preserved buildings that welcome visitors now were falling down.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JACK JOHNSON: So --

KAREN BREWSTER: Did the park own them yet?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes, they do.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:09:03]JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Um, so I worked that summer and then the following the summer, I -- the park was involved with, um, in the spring of '78, I guess it was, the park was involved with moving the Dyea Cemetery, which is mostly the Native cemetery.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: But it was being encroached upon by the Taiya River, and so nothing would do but the bodies needed to be exhumed and moved to another site, which they are now. We moved them over by the Slide Cemetery in Dyea.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And that was -- that was an interesting project. There was a crew of us, several people, exhuming the graves and trying to preserve everything and map everything. And we were under the direction of an archeologist from Anchorage, from the Anchorage office. I do not recall his name. Um, so that job lasted for a month or so. [00:10:21]I -- let's see, so that was as far as my work with the park. Then later on, in a year or so, I worked with the park when they started to refurbish their buildings, which involved a lot of work under the buildings.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: To excavate and prepare to lift them up and try to level them and that sort of work. So um, I don't know about specific years. I did that for a couple of summers. I was under the Mascot. Worked some, a little bit, on the Lynch & Kennedy. I remember roofing on the buildings that -- where Su would eventually have her shop, the --

KAREN BREWSTER: The cribs?

JOHN JACKSON: The cribs. And the -- the Verbauwhedes.

[00:11:27]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Ok. Um, so when you were doing that interpretation that first year in '77?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: You said there were four interpretive rangers and maybe four trail rangers?

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember the names of any of those people?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, Doug Sanvik was on the trail, and um, Phil. I can't remember his last name.

KAREN BREWSTER: OK.

JOHN JACKSON: And there were -- let's see, there were two women. Meg Jenson, who I think rather -- later worked up north. Um, oh boy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was Roy Nelson working there yet?

JOHN JACKSON: No, Roy was on the pipeline.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Those were his pipeline days. He -- I think he graduated from high school in '74.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Went right up north.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, so --

[00:12:41]KAREN BREWSTER: And who were your other interpretive rangers you worked with?

JOHN JACKSON: There was Linda Chesney. C-H-E-S-N-E-Y. Um, and Craig Juleen. Um, and one other fellow. We probably called him Red because he had red hair, but I don't remember his real name. So yeah, we were in uniform and manning the visitor center. I think we'd work maybe one or two people in there at a time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Course, we didn't have the thousands of visitors that we have now. This was, you know, in '77. Um, the railroad was still operating, of course, um, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you have a sense of how many visitors you'd get in a summer for the park?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, we seldom had more than a handful of people in the visitor center at a time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Were cruise ships coming in yet?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. But it was -- I'm guessing it was, like, ten or twenty ships a year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Instead of a day?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:14:09]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, yeah. I didn't -- I know that depot building was in disrepair until the Park Service fixed it up and made it their visitor center and administrative buildings.

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: But I didn't realize -- you guys could be in it in '77? It was safe enough?

JOHN JACKSON: Apparently. Yeah, we didn't -- it's not like we had bathrooms or, you know, obviously, anything like that. Um, but it was deemed safe. And, you know, it's a big building and structurally pretty sound.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Just the floor was kind of wavy.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that was just for the visitor center? The Park Service offices were still in like where the -- where were the Park Service offices?

JOHN JACKSON: The offices -- the superintendent had offices above the, uh, what -- what is it now? It's on -- it's right across the street from the hardware store on 4th and Broadway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was it a grocery store or something?

JOHN JACKSON: There was a grocery store there at one time. Um, Riewe's Grocery was there, but I don't think it was -- I don't think it was operated in the time when I was --

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: In -- that I was there. Um, it might've been the building just north of the grocery store.

KAREN BREWSTER: But --

JOHN JACKSON: Um -- go ahead.

[00:15:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I was going to say, but it wasn't in the depot building yet?

JOHN JACKSON: No. So the superintendent was up there, and he had a secretary. And -- There -- I don't know that there was much of a maintenance staff, even.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: At that time. Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: And all of you rangers were only seasonal, right? Were there any other - - who would've been a year-round employee?

JOHN JACKSON: At that time, the super. They were bringing in just temporary people to evaluate the buildings.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: From Denver or Anchorage. Um, and they -- those people would stay for -- they could stay for months. There was a fellow from Denver who was in Skagway and met quite a few folks. [00:16:51]When the park opened, it was -- they had a celebration on Broadway in, must have been early June of '77. And the community band played, and I played in the band. Um, what else can I tell you?

KAREN BREWSTER: Was the -- for that park opening celebration, what was the sense in the community? Were they happy to have a park there or not?

JOHN JACKSON: The, um -- it was mixed sentiment. There were some people who had worked real hard to get the park there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And uh, and then there was, probably at that time, there were probably more detractors then because they were, you know, didn't want to be encroached upon. They were used to having their way in Dyea and with hunting and fishing and use of the area.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Prior to the park's presence. Um, that sentiment is, I would like to think, is dwindled over the years and been assuaged, but the park brought in some real good people who understood the community and worked with the community.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And were aware of the sentiments, which I'm sure is the case in most parks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, so.

[00:18:29]KAREN BREWSTER: But at that time, what was the superintendent like? Would you -- Dick Hoffman, you said?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. Uh, he was probably the least effective of the superintendents they've had. He had a substance abuse problem.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hmm.

JOHN JACKSON: And he, yeah, he didn't last but a year or two. I don't remember if -- Clay Alderson was one of the early superintendents, and he was real good.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, not sure when Clay showed up, but he --

KAREN BREWSTER: '86.

JOHN JACKSON: Really? That late?

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: So he probably wasn't Dick's successor.

KAREN BREWSTER: No. Dick Simms, is that a familiar name?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: He may have been in between there.

JOHN JACKSON: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: I know he was there in '84. Or in '80, I think, he was even there. Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know all of them, but these are names I've heard --

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- people say.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right.

[00:19:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so do you remember Dick Simms?

JOHN JACKSON: Not specifically. Um, when I was doing the construction work in the '79 through '82, I'd usually get hired on as a seasonal carpenter's helper or whatever.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And my supervisors -- my -- the earliest one I remember is -- his name was Hank, let me get this right, Abplanaup? A-B-P-L-A-N-A-U-P. That's a brutalization.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, a couple of young architects. Ray Todd was a young architect and supervisor.

KAREN BREWSTER: And now, was Hank with the park's maintenance department?

JOHN JACKSON: He was -- he was an early construction boss.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, I think he was more concerned with restoration.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

[00:20:56]KAREN BREWSTER: And then you said Ray Todd. Other people you can remember?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, not really. Some of the local guys, like uh, I'm not sure when -- Si.

KAREN BREWSTER: Dennis?

JOHN JACKSON: Si Dennis.

KAREN BREWSTER: Junior or s --

JOHN JACKSON: Junior.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. He probably started working for them in the early '80's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: He just retired, like, last year, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, the other lady ranger, I think her last name was Ross. I remember she was involved with the -- the outdoor leadership school, her other job. I don't remember her first name.

[00:22:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so when you did the -- I'm going back to the beginning with your first job in '77 as the interpreter, did they provide any kind of training for you?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, it was mostly suggested reading. Um, there had been a -- there was one book, or one paper written by a gentleman who had hiked the trail and taken copious notes and wrote a paper.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, then there was some history. Um, of course, history of Skagway. Um, one of the suggested -- suggested readings was "Skagway in Days of Primeval" by Captain Moore's son.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Which I don't think I ever made it through that one.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was it -- why?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, it was pretty --

KAREN BREWSTER: I've not read it.

JOHN JACKSON: -- pretty disjointed and -- he was not a writer, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. [00:23:22]So do you remember any of the -- not word-for-word interpretive presentations you gave, but what the general gist and themes were that you presented to visitors?

JOHN JACKSON: We -- I think we based a lot of our -- our work on trying to share the story with the visitors from the photographs on the wall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: There was a -- the photographs were -- one was the most -- one that sticks in my mind is the one taken on Broadway when the rails still went up and down Broadway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: So that was, I believe -- I think those rails were taken up in the '30's. I'm not sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I can't remember.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Um, but that was an impressive picture. There was probably pictures from the old photographs from the Chilkoot Trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: And the Golden Stairs were probably on there.

KAREN BREWSTER: That classic picture.

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were there any artifacts that you had to use to help tell the story?

JOHN JACKSON: We -- we may have had an old shoe or something like that from the Chilkoot. At that time, we really didn't.

[00:24:45]KAREN BREWSTER: So did you write your own presentations, or was it given to you by somebody?

JOHN JACKSON: No, we were -- we were given free license to talk about whatever struck us. And we each had probably different interpretations, to overuse a word.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, but it wasn't really scripted.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember what your particular emphasis or interest was?

JOHN JACKSON: I basically just talked about the pictures on the wall and tried to include things that I thought were pertinent. Tried to present a picture of the gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And why the -- why we were there.

KAREN BREWSTER: I didn't know if you had any particular favorite little stories that you remember you told?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, I don't.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was quite a while ago.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, there you go.

[00:25:42]KAREN BREWSTER: Was there -- so there -- was there somebody who was head of interpretation?

JOHN JACKSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you all just reported to the superintendent?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. And it's not like he was supervising that closely.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, so yeah, we were given free rein. Um, right.

KAREN BREWSTER: And nowadays, of course, the rangers do walking tours.

JOHN JACKSON: They do.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you do that then?

JOHN JACKSON: No, we did not. No, that was pretty -- a pretty late development, as I recall, the walking tours. I mean, they've been doing them now for twenty years, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: We didn't -- we didn't do walking tours, which was unfortunate because -- there were um -- the tour activity and opportunities for visitors was pretty limited.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: As far as, compared to the myriad of shore excursions available now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, there was the train, and that was about it.

[00:26:51]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and in that time, the train was still an operational passenger-freight service, right?

JOHN JACKSON: It was.

KAREN BREWSTER: And it went all the way to Whitehorse still?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, the -- yes. Yes. They had passenger service to Whitehorse until '82, I believe.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And did the tourists who came into town on the cruise ships, did they go onto the train?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, they did.?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. They had -- the trains were able to back right down to the dock.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: And just -- and I think the -- the railroad dock, which is the dock on the east side of the valley.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Which is the primary, the original dock, and was the only one. The ore terminal was not used as a cruise ship berth.

KAREN BREWSTER: The ore terminal was already there?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Oh yeah, it would've been because that's -- it loaded up the ships.

JOHN JACKSON: It was in '69-'70 was when they started that whole show.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

[00:27:59]KAREN BREWSTER: But so, the tourists would get on the train and ride it, but it didn't have the whole spiel that they do now, right?

JOHN JACKSON: They -- the railroad offered a, what they called the Bennett Turn, which was probably the -- well, no. The Bennett Turn was a round trip-er. And probably, I think just the passenger train.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Went to Bennett, served lunch in the eating house, and then returned to Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, the freight trains were running mostly at night, hauling -- hauling the ore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And would tourists just take the train up to Whitehorse to see Whitehorse?

JOHN JACKSON: And they -- besides the Bennett Turn, they could also go to Whitehorse, yeah. Or come down from Whitehorse.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: If they flew into Whitehorse or what have you.

[00:29:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Um, I just thought about something else about the train and the -- but that the train went all the way to the cruise ships out at the dock, which is different than now.

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, it still does.

KAREN BREWSTER: It still goes all the way out?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. Somehow I thought that --

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. They've um -- the track got moved over right on the -- on the dock.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: It was right on the mountain on its -- on the roadbed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: Which is -- the roadbed is still there.

KAREN BREWSTER: But they moved it closer to the boats, I guess?

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you know why they moved it?

JOHN JACKSON: Just for convenience, for safety.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember when that happened?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, it was after I -- I started on the railroad in '88. I think it was perhaps 1990.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: When they moved the track over on the railroad dock.

[00:30:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and you said, you know, in '77, there weren't that many visitors coming through and not so many cruise ships. Do you know why that changed, why that's increased so much?

JOHN JACKSON: Just the general tourism traffic in Alaska. To Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: I mean, the railroad shut down in '82 when they lost the Anvil Mine.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And reopened in '88 just for passenger service, the seasonal passenger service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And I think that first year, the railroad hauled, oh my goodness, what was it? Maybe twenty thousand people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: Now they're hauling over four hundred thousand.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: Course, they have a lot more trains.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

[00:31:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah, and I was wondering, like what happened between '77 and '88 to shift that number of people?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, it was -- it was just a matter of having the ships with the people to justify the --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: The traffic was generally -- was slowly building up over those years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And finally in '88, they said, "Ok, well, looks like we could make money." You know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Re -- bringing the service back, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Do you think the City of Skagway or the Park or individual people went out to the Lower 48 and the tourist market and sold Skagway?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah. Yes. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, we had a -- a dynamic state tourism office, and it -- You know, I think there was an ad on the Super Bowl one year in those early years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: It was quite the deal. But that's how it got built up.

[00:32:23]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. I'm interested in knowing more about the movement of the cemetery in Dyea because I think that's a very specialized thing you did, that not many people did that.

JOHN JACKSON: True. It's the star of my resume.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so yeah, how did you get involved with that? And you kind of gave a summary of it, but maybe you can remember some of the details.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, they needed to move the cemetery because the Taiya (River) was encroaching. It was -- Originally, it was as you crossed the bridge into Dyea, it was on a point of land south of that bridge, probably a quarter mile. Um, we -- exhuming the graves, I remember some individuals or names. There was -- well, the names are now in the -- we tried to keep the gravestones.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Or mark the graves best we could.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did you do it one grave at a time, by hand?

JOHN JACKSON: It was all hand-dug, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you hand-dug out -- you hand-dug to exhume.

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then you moved to the new cemetery location. Did you hand-dig those graves?

JOHN JACKSON: I think so, yeah. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you do --

JOHN JACKSON: Usually, the caskets were deteriorated.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: And it was just skeletons. Clothing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: There was some clothing. And shoes. Um, I really don't remember actual skeletons just very much, but um, I remember some clothing and trying to keep everything together.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And -- and record things that we found. Um, there were -- there may have been some jewelry. There may have been some gold teeth. [00:34:39]I think -- I remember Sophie Matthews, I believe, was one of the people in the cemetery. There was -- I don't know if Skookum -- Skookum Jim from -- of gold rush fame was there, but possibly a relative.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Same last name.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was --

JOHN JACKSON: Jim.

KAREN BREWSTER: Jim was the last name?

JOHN JACKSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, what was his last name? He was Skookum Jim -- well, doesn't matter. It's written down so many places.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Now, who was Sophie Matthews?

JOHN JACKSON: Sophie Matthews was -- I really don't know her history.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: I think the Matthews family was a Native family, um, in the area.

[00:35:33]There was some concern by some local Natives in Skagway, which was very few, about disturbing those graves.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: But they were about to be washed away, and it was inevitable. And, you know, it's a good thing we did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so did any members of the local Native community come out to the work site and --

JOHN JACKSON: No, I don't remember ever seeing anybody on site. Um, Larry Jacquot was one of the -- his -- I think he had ancestors in there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: I think he was originally from, um, Haines. His family was. He was -- he worked as a conductor on the railroad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And has a family in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I know the name.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

[00:36:31]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so that cemetery in Dyea was mostly Native people, you think?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. Yeah. Um, because, of course, there was a major Native settlement in Dyea originally.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: The packers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, I knew that -- the Native history, going back and forth there, but I always thought, like, at least in Skagway, that they didn't really live there very much. But in Dyea, they did settle there, or seasonally, at least?

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right. Yeah. Uh, Wayne Greenstreet was one of the people on the crew who is probably still in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was Karl Gurcke helping with the archeology?

JOHN JACKSON: Karl wasn't there yet.

KAREN BREWSTER: He wasn't there yet. Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: The archeologist was, I believe, out of Anchorage. I don't remember his name.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, it wasn't Ted Birkedal?

JOHN JACKSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: I know I've read it, the name. I can't think of it. [00:37:42]But that's what I was wondering, is how you knew where to dig. You know, I mean, say it's something you have to really keep track of very carefully.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. The -- I think there were still some gravestones. Um, and I don't know just -- I don't remember what years that cemetery was active.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: But it was long before I got there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And were you very closely supervised, then, by that archeologist?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.
KAREN BREWSTER: They were there on site, and whenever you --
JOHN JACKSON: Yes, he was. He was.
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.
JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.
KAREN BREWSTER: So if there were no skeletons, or you say the caskets were --
JOHN JACKSON: Wooden.
KAREN BREWSTER: Had fallen apart?
JOHN JACKSON: Right.
KAREN BREWSTER: Were there pieces?
JOHN JACKSON: They were just rotted wood.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.
JACKSON: Yeah.
KAREN BREWSTER: There must -- I would think there would've still been some bones left.
JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.
KAREN BREWSTER: But you don't remember that?
JOHN JACKSON: I don't remember that specifically, no.
KAREN BREWSTER: Blocked it out of your memory.
JOHN JACKSON: I don't remember it being spooky or unpleasant. I mean we were -- we were really trying to preserve everything.
KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.
JOHN JACKSON: And, uh.
[00:39:06]KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember how many people were on the crew?
JOHN JACKSON: There may have been six of us.
KAREN BREWSTER: And what kind of a work schedule did you have?
JOHN JACKSON: I think it was just eight-hour days.
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah.
JOHN JACKSON: Five of them.
KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember how long it took?
JOHN JACKSON: Uh, three to four weeks.
KAREN BREWSTER: That's not so long.
JOHN JACKSON: No.
KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember how many graves, total?
JOHN JACKSON: I think there were fewer than twenty.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And they were all moved to the Slide Cemetery?
JOHN JACKSON: Near the Slide Cemetery, yeah. And that -- then there's, you know, a separate area for them.
KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.
JOHN JACKSON: It's probably very clearly marked by now.
KAREN BREWSTER: Right. At the time --
JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, I mean, the Slide Cemetery has undergone some refurbishment and preservation.
KAREN BREWSTER: But it was already there in '78.
JOHN JACKSON: It was. It sure was.
KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah, it would have been. When was that slide?

JOHN JACKSON: 1898.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: April '98.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. [00:40:21]So do you have any memory of who at the park might have planned and supervised this cemetery move and deciding where to put the new graves?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, no.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause somebody must have said, "Put this one there. Put that one there."

JOHN JACKSON: Oh. Oh. Um, no. Nothing that specific. I mean, unless -- unless the archeologist did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: He may -- he obviously told us where to put 'em. Um, I think -- I think they were given new caskets. I think they built wooden caskets for them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And so we would deposit the remains in a wooden casket. And they were just rough lumber.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: I don't remember who built them.

KAREN BREWSTER: But they were -- you remember that they were there, though?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you think the archeologist told you where to put the new graves?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

[00:41:34]KAREN BREWSTER: I wonder if they did clearance on the site? If they, when you dug up those new holes, you know, was there any archeological material that was found? Do you remember?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, no. No, I don't. Um, I mean, aside -- it was adjacent to the Slide Cemetery.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: But it would've been in a remote area, so it's not like it was a settled area.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well.

JOHN JACKSON: And evidence of -- of people being there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Yeah, I was just wondering if the archeologist must -- somebody decided that that location was a good place to move it to.

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Maybe because it was by the Slide Cemetery already?

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know. [00:42:27]Um, so then you said you worked on the, um, some of the building reconstruction.

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Can you tell me about that?

JOHN JACKSON: The -- well, let's see. The railroad shut down in '82.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: And by then, the park had purchased some buildings and was actively trying to restore them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: So they hired a pretty big crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you have carpentry experience?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, a little bit. Yeah. Just from in the -- in the years between my summer at the park and working for the park with the restoration. Worked with a private contractor, Jim Jewell.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

JOHN JACKSON: Who later became Jewell Construction and did a lot of construction on Broadway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Is that the same as Jewell Gardens Jewell?

JOHN JACKSON: His wife.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. [00:43:45]Um, yeah. So anyway, so the big crew and gosh, it must have been -- the railroad shut down in the fall of '82. I'm guessing maybe the spring and summer of '83 they hired the big crew to start working on buildings. Some of us were working -- well, I remember a couple of conductors off the railroad who had carpentry experience were working there. Lee Hartson and Larry Sullivan were both working on that crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, I think -- I think Hank was there then. That would've been when he was there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: I think my last summer working for the park in the restoration was '85.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And uh, we -- I remember working on the Verbauwhede building, where Su's shop was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. What did you do on that building? Do you remember?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, we were putting a new roof on it. Apparently, the other work had been done. Um, Terry Jacobson was on that crew. Which Mahle boy? One of the -- M-A-H-L-E. Doug Mahle was working on that crew. I think Doug Sanvik, the former ranger on the trail, was working on that crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, that's about it that I can remember.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were those buildings safe enough to be up on the roof?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, that one had been fixed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. [00:46:06]The -- in the -- in 1980 -- I also worked for a private contractor, putting the foundation under the old depot building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, you did?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I heard that that was a complicated job.

JOHN JACKSON: I remember, um, well, I was in a -- I was working for Olie Schladerholt, and John Puljonsick. They were the -- they had formed a partnership and were working as a contractor.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And I worked with those guys for that foundation under the depot building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: As well as the Pack Train restoration, which was not a park building. That was still -- still privately owned.

KAREN BREWSTER: And is that -- where is that?

JOHN JACKSON: The Pack Train is the corner of 4th and Broadway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. [00:47:27]So what did you do on that foundation? Were you pouring the cement?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. Yes. There was a lot of excavation underneath. The -- pouring the cement, we -- it was a -- we -- I think we poured the footers and built a pony wall for the exterior. The interior was post and -- pad and post. In order to pour the pads, we'd form them up underneath, but we'd actually cut a hole -- used a hole saw and drill a hole above each pad and be able to wheel barrow the cement in and pour it through a tube into the hole down to the pad below.

KAREN BREWSTER: So --

JOHN JACKSON: Rather than trying to get cement through a narrow space.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: We just poured it through the floor.

KAREN BREWSTER: You cut a hole in the floor of the building?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. Yeah, 'cause I heard that you couldn't raise it up high enough to -- they -- that's why they had to excavate down.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that made it hard to get under there for the cement.

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

[00:48:38]KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know enough about how cement foundations are constructed.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Well, this -- we poured a footer, um, through -- for the perimeter and built a, what they call a pony wall. It was only probably two or three feet high, just a framed lumber wall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then you pour the cement into that frame?

JOHN JACKSON: Right. We were able to -- on the exterior, they were able to pour it from the -- from the outside.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: But on the -- to pour the pads under the interior of the building, they had to -- of course, it was an original floor. It was pretty thick. They --

KAREN BREWSTER: And they let you cut holes in it?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: 'Cause it was all gonna get restored anyway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Oh, I see.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And -- and they -- the floor was still in place. 'Cause they put new joists in, right?

JOHN JACKSON: Probably. Or shored them up where they could.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, right.

JOHN JACKSON: Just --

[00:49:49]KAREN BREWSTER: So but the -- the posts you were putting in -- you poured the footer, and then there was, like, wooden posts that they -- or piers that they'd built?

JOHN JACKSON: Right. The pad -- the pad, and then the posts would sit on top of that with hardware to hold it in place on the --

KAREN BREWSTER: But don't you have to put that post in when the cement's wet?

JOHN JACKSON: Nope.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: No, after it hardens. You just set it on top.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: We probably poured in -- when we poured the cement, we had a post holder.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Fixed in the cement, and you just plant the post on that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And then just fasten it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And then, uh --

[00:50:30]KAREN BREWSTER: But when you poured the cement down there for that footer, had you built a frame so that would keep the cement a certain shape and depth and all that?

JOHN JACKSON: Sure. Sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did you get down there to build that frame?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, that was -- there was like a four-foot space. I mean, a man could get down there, but you didn't really want to push a wheel barrow through there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Full of cement.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you didn't have hoses or anything that you could --

JOHN JACKSON: We didn't have the pump trucks that they have now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And they --

KAREN BREWSTER: So the only option was --

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. So that was how they did it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. That's the key, is that the technology was different.

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. Yes. It certainly was.

[00:51:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and I didn't rea -- I know that the, you know, these were Park Service buildings that they had this big crew that was working on the restoration, but they hired contractors to do some of it?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. And uh, I would say over the years, it's been an exception to hire contractors. They mostly did it with their own people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Even the most -- more recent work they've done on the building on 5th, the YMCA building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: That's mostly done with park's people. And see, when did they build their shop?

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, mid-'90's. Early or mid-'90's, I think.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, that sounds about right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, 'cause Doreen did all the archeological clearance work on that.

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, she did?

KAREN BREWSTER: A lot of it, I think. Yeah. Um, but ma -- do you know why they hired the contractor for that foundation?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, because they could. Um, I -- they probably didn't have a -- they didn't want to put on a -- they were, you know, finding themselves, you know, and trying to get established. And it -- in order to just build up their workforce and whatever over the years and decide what they wanted to do, they used a contractor. Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: I was wondering if it was because it was cement, that that's not something the Park Service had the equipment or talent?

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right. That's a lot of it, too.

KAREN BREWSTER: And now they do have those sort of opportunities in the Park Service?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, I don't know how much of the foundation work they do. Well, they're not really building with -- I think they built the shop, but that was contracted out.

[00:53:17]KAREN BREWSTER: And the YMCA-Meyer building, I don't know if they needed foundation work done.

JOHN JACKSON: Probably, but I don't either. I don't either.

KAREN BREWSTER: I just assume every old building in Skagway is gonna need to be lifted up.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know, because they didn't build cement foundations in those days.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right, they -- sometimes they didn't really have a foundation.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. That's why they were falling apart.

JOHN JACKSON: Exactly.

[00:53:44]KAREN BREWSTER: So in those years you worked for the park, you were working seasonally.

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: What did you do in the winter time?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, usually travel. Go see my family.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And --

JOHN JACKSON: My sister was in Seattle area at the time. My parents were in Colorado. Sometimes I'd take road trips with friends.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause at this point, you and Su were not yet married?

JOHN JACKSON: That's correct. We didn't meet until '91.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Because she was not there 'til '91.

JOHN JACKSON: Exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's what she told me before. [00:54:20]So um, so what was it like working for the Park Service in those early years?

JOHN JACKSON: It was ok. I mean, I was usually under a building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Didn't leave my hard hat behind. Um, it was a good job. It paid ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. What were the other people like?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, mostly just local guys. Friends. Pretty much knew who we were working with.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: That was helpful.

[00:54:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Do you feel like the Park Service made an effort to hire locally?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or did they -- they did?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah. For that type of work, there was plenty of -- plenty of help.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And when you were the interpretive ranger, you were -- well, you were sort of local at that point.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, I'd been there a couple years.

KAREN BREWSTER: But the other people were all from Outside?

JOHN JACKSON: They were.

KAREN BREWSTER: And how did that go?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, California. I think they were all from California. [00:55:25]Um, Doug and Phil had been -- it was not their first summer on the trail. They had -- I think they had experience originally working out of Glacier Bay.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Like in, pretty -- well, they were on the trail -- they established a trail presence out at Glacier Bay before the park actually came into existence.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And I don't remember if it was the state -- state parks had a presence and influence, but I -- I'm pretty sure Doug and Phil were hired out of Glacier Bay.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I know that there's --

JOHN JACKSON: And then Scott -- Scott Sappington. Well, he's changed his name to Scott Home.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, he and Doug were, I think, the original rangers on the trail. And that was before I got there. So they -- they were working out of Glacier Bay.

[00:56:32]KAREN BREWSTER: So what was that trail like back in '77?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, well, I haven't been on it since. It was -- it was --

KAREN BREWSTER: What was -- what was its --

JOHN JACKSON: It was a trail. I thought it was ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: I mean, there was -- in ensuing years, it had some flooding. I don't remember any flooding.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was it -- was it brushed out?

JOHN JACKSON: I remember --

KAREN BREWSTER: You could follow it?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. Um, yes. Yes, it was. I remember building a -- when I was up there for a week or so, I remember building a make-shift bridge across the creek that was -- needed to -- needed to have a bridge. That was right near the Sheep Camp.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, yeah, that was my question was, were there bridges, or did they get washed out?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, there weren't -- if they had had bridges, there were very few and pretty old.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: I don't really remember any bridges.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you --

JOHN JACKSON: Except the one I built.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So you had to do creek crossings?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. Which was pretty rudimentary because we were not trained for that or didn't have the materials. Unlike nowadays, when they do have those things and they helicopter in materials.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Yeah, I was going --

JOHN JACKSON: They do things right, according to government specs and the whole thing.

[00:57:59]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that bridge you built, what did you build it out of? How did you build it?

JOHN JACKSON: Just threw a couple logs across the creek. I think we called it "The bridge not for the faint of heart." And uh, you know, non-disclaimer.

KAREN BREWSTER: No railings?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, no. No.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did you have a chain --

JOHN JACKSON: It was a very -- it was -- I mean, you probably couldn't jump across it, but you needed a bridge.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: And it was right near the Sheep Camp, if not in Sheep Camp.

[00:58:30]KAREN BREWSTER: And did you have a chainsaw to cut some local trees down to use?

JOHN JACKSON: Don't remember a chainsaw.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or were those logs already down?

JOHN JACKSON: They were probably already down. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's what I was thinking, what kind of supplies did you have for building a bridge?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Like I say, rudimentary. Not for the faint of heart.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: It was not government-approved.

KAREN BREWSTER: And the other places where you had to cross the river or creeks, you just waded through?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, I remember wading. There's -- of course, those were, I don't know, drier years. I don't know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or there were enough rocks, you could hop across?

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right.

[00:59:14]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, and there were no approved campgrounds yet at that time, were there?

JOHN JACKSON: There was -- well, there was still a camp at Canyon City, which was not -- I mean, there were no tents. There was a shelter at Sheep Camp at that time, so that would probably have been done by the, I don't know, the state people or --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: I don't remember Doug or Scott saying anything about building the shelter at Sheep Camp, but it -- that was a building with bunk beds.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, rangers had wall tents. Um --

KAREN BREWSTER: And at Canyon City, was there anything there?

JOHN JACKSON: Boy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or Finnegan's?

JOHN JACKSON: I think there was just campsites. And, you know, Finnegan's, there was nothing. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. [01:00:14]And then, you said you would then hike on up over - out to Bennett. So what about Happy Camp and Lindemans and all those ones on the Canadian side?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, those folks were living in style.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, really?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah, the Canadians. That was the highlight of the summer, to go to Lindeman and have dinner with the Canadian rangers. They had a nice wall tent.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. But it was still a wall tent?

JOHN JACKSON: I think so. Yeah. Yeah. They had -- I think that was the only building, or the only camp was at Lindeman where the rangers stayed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Of course, they'd patrol like we did to the summit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so there wasn't even a Happy Camp facility?

JOHN JACKSON: I don't remember one, no. I doubt it.

[01:01:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so when you said you patrolled, what does that mean? What did you do?

JOHN JACKSON: We'd walk from Sheep Camp to the summit, make sure the hikers were getting over, and um, just ensure the safety of the trail and the hikers.

KAREN BREWSTER: How was the trail marked up over the summit? Or was it?

JOHN JACKSON: Not particularly. I mean, it was still the big scree area.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: You gained a lot of sympathy for the stampeders.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did you know where the -- or how would a hiker know where the trail was?

JOHN JACKSON: Just following the wear on the -- on the rocks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: I mean, you could see the trail at the top, and the trail led right up to the scree.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. We didn't have any other markers in the scree area. I don't know if they do now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I think they do now.

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, do they?

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah. And I mean, you think about those clouds come in, and you can't see the summit.

JOHN JACKSON: There you go.

[01:02:19]KAREN BREWSTER: So. How -- if hikers ever got lost?

JOHN JACKSON: They may have. I don't recall anything.

KAREN BREWSTER: Not in your time?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you have to --

JOHN JACKSON: And we didn't have -- did we have any communication? We may have had -- I think we had a radio, and um, the reception was pretty poor. I guess we must've been talking to town. I don't think we were talking to Glacier Bay.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: There was, um -- when we went up for a week, the regular ran -- one of the regular rangers would be there, um, to -- to direct us.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it wasn't just you in-town guys?

JOHN JACKSON: And just do stuff they didn't want to do.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Like?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, oh, I -- I mean, they could have. I don't remember anything particularly disagreeable.

KAREN BREWSTER: You don't remember -- ok. But that one of the regular rangers was still there with you.

JOHN JACKSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: You weren't --

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Just by yourself.

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

[01:03:28]KAREN BREWSTER: But do you remember any rescuing of hikers?

JOHN JACKSON: No. No, we were very fortunate because we were not trained to do that sort of thing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did the regular rangers ever talk about having done that?

JOHN JACKSON: Not at that time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And again, there weren't as many people --

JOHN JACKSON: Exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- on the trail. And that's -- I'm a little surprised that there were enough hikers using the trail to justify having, you know, two rangers there at all times.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, well, I mean, it was -- it was, um, an established popular backpacking trail even then.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: It's just doesn't get near the traffic that it does now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Do you remember, like, how many people would be using it?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, I remember my times up there, the Sheep Camp shelter was quite often pretty full.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, I have no idea of specific numbers.

[01:04:33]KAREN BREWSTER: Besides your -- you know, having meals with the Canadian rangers, do you remember what the relationship between the US and the Canadian side was and how that worked?

JOHN JACKSON: On the trail, it was very good. Yeah. Parks Canada.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Christine was still there. Well, she was there -- she might still be there.

KAREN BREWSTER: She -- Hans -- Christine Hanson, is that her last name? No. (It is Christine Hedgecock)

JOHN JACKSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: I know the name.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Karl's mentioned it. I think she still is. But she was the ranger back then?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. She was married then to Manfred. They were both rangers. Christine and Manfred.

[01:05:11]KAREN BREWSTER: So were you able to communicate with them?

JOHN JACKSON: I don't think so. I mean, we'd see 'em at the summit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: There was like a -- there was a building there, and it was like -- it was an outhouse. It looked like an outhouse, but it wasn't really an outhouse. But it was just a shelter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

JOHN JACKSON: And uh, but I don't remember any specific radio communications from there. Um.

KAREN BREWSTER: But you guys would meet and exchange information or whatever?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[01:05:45]KAREN BREWSTER: And at that point, there wasn't the permit system of -- for hiking the trail, was there?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, no. No, there wasn't. I don't know that anybody even had to register that they were on the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And was there -- that -- is why I was asking because, you know, now, don't the Parks Canada rangers check passports now at the -- I mean, you're crossing the Canadian border.

JOHN JACKSON: No idea. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did you guys -- was there any thought about that at the time, that you're crossing the Canadian border?

JOHN JACKSON: No. No. The nearest customs station would've been at Whitehorse.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, 'cause the Klondike Highway wasn't there?

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right. They started work -- they were working on the Klondike. It opened, I think, in '78.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: That was my summer job in '78, one of my summer jobs in '78.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, 'cause you worked on the cemetery.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, that was in the spring, and then I -- I got involved in community theater, even in my teaching days.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

JOHN JACKSON: And I got involved in the Days of '98 show.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: And I did that for a number of summers. [01:07:05]But in the summer of '78, it was a pretty busy summer. I got hired on, it must've been in -- I think it was August. I got hired on to -- by the state for, um, on a survey crew to remeasure, um, excavation and fill for the -- there was a dispute with the contractor.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, on the Klondike Highway?

JOHN JACKSON: On the Klondike Highway, yeah. Sorry. So that was another job.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what did that -- what does that mean? What did you do?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, we were just -- I was a chainman, so I got to grab one end of a tape and scurry up the side of the rock face and hold the tape and measure how far from center line we were. And we had a -- an instrument, of sorts from, you know, 1978. Measure the angle and compute the -- how much material was moved.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. And so, did it solve the dispute?

JOHN JACKSON: No idea. Over my pay grade.

KAREN BREWSTER: You just provided the data, and that was it?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. Yes.

[01:08:23]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, there was something else I was going to ask about the trail in '77. Oh, bears. It was linked to the hikers and safety, and did you ever have to deal with bears?

JOHN JACKSON: No. We didn't even have bear spray. There was no -- I never saw a bear.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: I don't remember any reports of a bear.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you have to carry a weapon?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, no. Oh, no.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Well, you were -- you were interpretive ranger. What training -- what weapons training, would you have had?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Or first aid, for that matter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, really? No first aid training?

JOHN JACKSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, the regular ranger on the trail must've had those trainings.

JOHN JACKSON: Presumably, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Presumably.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so when you went up for a week, so you were on the trail for a week while they had a week off?

JOHN JACKSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then you'd -- so each of you interpretive rangers would -- one of you would go up?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, I think I got to go up to go there -- got to go there twice over the summer.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's pretty nice.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. [01:09:34]Um, so tell me about the Days of '98 show. That sounds pretty fun.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, when I got to town, um, it was -- the Days of '98 show started way back in the -- possibly the 20's or 30's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wasn't it Martin It -- did Martin Itjen start it, I think?

JOHN JACKSON: I don't know if it was that early. Um, it was -- it was a community show. It was done in the Eagles Hall, and I think the Eagles Auxiliary started it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And they did -- they did some dramatic skits. They did the shooting of Dan McGrew. They had a character named Queenie, who was dressed in costume. And we'd select a -- she'd do a narration, and she'd go grab a guy out of the audience and dance with him. And there -- they had a little band.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you --

JOHN JACKSON: Um, that was -- Cy Coyne, Sr., was -- had a beautiful voice, and he was in the band. Um, I think also, um, (whispered) ah boy, names. Oh, anyway, I -- my first involvement was the summer of, must have been '76, between -- between my teaching years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, I'd go do the show. And I sang "Daisy, Daisy" with Barbara Moore. Um, we had gambling. We had phony gambling, before -- and then they'd -- with phony money. [01:11:39]And they -- so the community did it through '77, and then uh, there was a -- a couple of guys down the street who started the Soapy Smith show in, I don't know what year they started. Probably '70 -- probably '75, maybe '74. They -- the fellow's name was Biss. Tom Biss was Soapy. And his sidekick -- one of his sidekicks, was Jim Richards. And I think Steve Hites was also in that show.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: So um, Jim approached the Eagles about moving that Soapy Smith show up to the Eagles hall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And he -- Tom Biss left town. Jim took the helm, and um, the Eagles was essentially inactive. Um, so Jim and some of his friends, myself included, became Eagles.

KAREN BREWSTER: Just to keep the chapter going?

JOHN JACKSON: And -- to keep the chapter going and to establish a venue for his show. And we also -- besides Jim -- besides doing the Soapy show, which was pretty much a one-man show, uh, we tried to recreate the Days of '98 show, which -- which they actually wrote a play for.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And had a cast of many people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: And, you know, paid 'em twenty-five bucks a night, and did shows. I think we did a show every night.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or at least every night there was a ship in town?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, no. It didn't neces -- well, we had the -- we also had passenger traffic off the train.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm, that's right.

JOHN JACKSON: They're staying at the Klondike, what was then the Klondike Hotel.

[01:14:00]Um, and then -- so anyway, so then '78 was the first year for the Gold Rush Productions, which is what Jim called his --

KAREN BREWSTER: So that was like the combination of the Days of '98 with the Soapy Smith production?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Well, they were separate shows, but anybody performed them both in the -- in the Eagles Hall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. You didn't really combine them into one show?

JOHN JACKSON: We used the soap pitch in the Days of '98 show. We used some parts of the Soapy show in the Days of '98 show.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I would think you'd have to tell the Soapy Smith story in the Days of '98.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, that -- that was the gist of it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: It was. It was pretty much a Soapy Smith show, but -- story, but with a larger cast. And uh, it was a lot of fun.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, so yeah, I was --

[01:14:53]KAREN BREWSTER: So what different parts did you play?

JOHN JACKSON: I was JD Stewart.

KAREN BREWSTER: Who is?

JOHN JACKSON: JD Stewart was a miner that came down to Skagway and got his gold stolen by Soapy's gang.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right. That sort of set --

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- set off the --

JOHN JACKSON: Set off the -- the confrontation between Soapy and Frank Reid.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. I also played -- in later years, I played Frank Reid. Wait a minute, did I play Frank? I played Soapy one year. It was the first time he was ever -- didn't have a beard.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. And Jim had a --

KAREN BREWSTER: They didn't -- they didn't make you grow a beard?

JOHN JACKSON: I -- no, they didn't. Not that I could've. But um, they didn't even give me a fake one.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:15:40]JOHN JACKSON: But at any rate, Jim and his wife, Dorothy, had a, um, child who needed -- with special needs, and they needed to go back to Baltimore.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: They found a place to help the child, but it was going to involve therapy that they had to administer.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And so, they took off in the middle of the summer, and they asked me to be Soapy, and I did for a couple weeks.

KAREN BREWSTER: You don't sound very thrilled with it.

JOHN JACKSON: It was -- it was a challenge.

KAREN BREWSTER: Why?

JOHN JACKSON: But it was fun. I mean, it was -- it was a major part, and um --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I see.

JOHN JACKSON: But at that juncture of my life, I don't think I had a day job, and so I was an obvious choice. Uh, yeah. Talent was kinda hard to come by. But anyway, um, yeah. Days of '98 show.

[01:16:39]KAREN BREWSTER: Sounds like you enjoyed doing the show, though.

JOHN JACKSON: I did. I did. I mean, I -- that summer of '78, I ended up working up on the road for nine hours a day, then I'd beat feet into town and go do the show at night.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, it was a busy year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: But I was young, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what was it that you liked about being in the production?

JOHN JACKSON: I was into theater at the time. You know, I had done some acting. And then, so that was an opportunity to do that.

[01:17:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And you mentioned community theater. Did Skagway have other community theater activities?

JOHN JACKSON: We had the Poverty Players.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Tell me about --

JOHN JACKSON: The Poverty Players in Skagway were established, um, well, when I got there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because you established them?

JOHN JACKSON: No, I didn't. I was -- I just joined in. But we did some plays in the winter time, and let's see. I actually directed a couple, which is really interesting 'cause I really didn't have much theater experience. Um, we did -- Well, in those years, I remember -- names of the play. Um, Barbara Moore, who I mentioned earlier, I sang Daisy with.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: She was a -- a strong proponent of the Poverty Players.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

JOHN JACKSON: And so they'd, you know, try to do a show in whichever venue in town they could heat.

[01:18:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, one is, what shows do you remember doing? And then, where were they performed?

JOHN JACKSON: We did, um, I was in a -- I think my first play was in -- must have been in the spring of '77. Um, it was a -- I was -- myself and a woman were -- it had to do with -- oh, it was called "I'm Herbert."

KAREN BREWSTER: Never even heard of it.

JOHN JACKSON: I was Herbert. And we were two old people just having a conversation. And, uh, we talked about Baltimore Orioles, and I don't remember the plot of the play.

KAREN BREWSTER: I've never even heard of it.

JOHN JACKSON: And we did that in the Klondike Hotel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. How much of an audience would you get?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, the whole town turned up. No, really.

KAREN BREWSTER: Which, I don't know how many people in the winter that would've been.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, we -- we'd get, you know, thirty or forty people.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's pretty good.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. [01:19:38]Oh, and then in the spring of '78 -- '78? Nope, must've been '79. I was on the front page of the first Skagway News.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: As the main character in "Butterflies Are Free."

KAREN BREWSTER: Never heard of that one either.

JOHN JACKSON: Really?

KAREN BREWSTER: Huh-uh.

JOHN JACKSON: It was a cast of two men and two women. And it was directed -- oh, it was -- it must have been the spring of '78 because we -- the arts council at that time in Alaska had lots of money.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. The Alaska State Council for the Arts?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, that's what they call it now, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: We just called it the arts council.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: But they were able to bring in a director.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: Who whipped us into shape, and we did "Butterflies Are Free" in the Presbyterian rec hall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: With Connie Lehman, who was a coach's wife. Um, coached -- basketball coach. His name was Don Lehman. Um, and another woman whose name I don't recall, and the music teacher's husband. Boy, I can't believe how much I can't remember.

KAREN BREWSTER: I'm thinking you remember --

JOHN JACKSON: It's pretty scary.

KAREN BREWSTER: I think you're remembering a lot.

JOHN JACKSON: Really?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I'm not going to ask you to recite any lines from the plays.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, thank you.

KAREN BREWSTER: The fact that you can remember any of it is very impressive.

JOHN JACKSON: Aw, man.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you certainly -- you probably didn't do musicals, did you?

JOHN JACKSON: No.

[01:21:42]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, are there any other plays you remember? How long were you involved in the community theater?

JOHN JACKSON: Um, we took a play to the -- the -- well, hopefully it's still going on. They'd have a state community theater festival in Haines every year, and we took a play down there, um, which I directed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember what it was?

JOHN JACKSON: For lack of a better word. Um, it would've been the spring of '77. Winter-spring of '77.

KAREN BREWSTER: So before "I'm Herbert?"

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And what play was that? You don't remember?

JOHN JACKSON: Can't tell you.

KAREN BREWSTER: I thought since you directed it.

JOHN JACKSON: We had a -- I remember David Moore, who was in high school at the time. He's now a successful architect in Anchorage. Um, Barbara was in it, and Opal LaForce was -- no, Opal was in "I'm Herbert" with me.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: She was --

KAREN BREWSTER: She was your --

JOHN JACKSON: My counterpart, yeah. I think --

KAREN BREWSTER: Who was she?

JOHN JACKSON: And I think -- she was in town. Her husband worked for the power company.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm. And the Moores, they're not related to the original Moore family?

JOHN JACKSON: No, no, no. Paul and Barbara -- Paul taught school, and Barbara did Poverty Players and raised children. They had twelve of 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: That was a full-time job for her. Sure.

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[01:23:38]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And then, how long did the Poverty Players continue to perform?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, probably into the '80's. Um, we took in the -- boy, in the early '80's, we -- Jeff Brady wrote a play.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: About -- and it's kind of about Stroller White (Elmer J. "Stroller" White). But he wrote a play, and we -- let's see, I think he directed it. I was in it. I was the crusty old newspaperman. Um, Paul Kirk was in it. We took that play to Dawson City.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: For a theater festival in Dawson in the spring of, oh gosh. I think I was working on the depot. I remember going into a rehearsal. Two of the -- two of the kids in the play were in high school. They were Paul and Chris Kirk. Um, Paul won an acting award in Dawson.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. At that festival?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. And uh, I guess Jeff directed it.

KAREN BREWSTER: You said he wrote it and directed -- well --

JOHN JACKSON: He wrote it and directed it. Yeah, I -- I remember going into a rehearsal, and I'd been shoveling concrete all day, and I was pretty tired. And the boys were just being boys and acting up, and I kinda got on 'em.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And anyway, that's a memory from that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: We were rehearsing in our -- in the old school. Um, we must've performed it in Skagway, but I don't remember where.

[01:26:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Did you ever perform in the school?

JOHN JACKSON: Well.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did they have a facility for that?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, as a matter of fact, my first year, I got hoodwinked into directing the Christmas play, which was "The Grinch That Stole Christmas."

KAREN BREWSTER: They still did an annual school Christmas program?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. We did it in the school gym. Cast of thousands. I think we pretty much included all the -- at least all the grade school kids.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I mean, how many kids would've been in the school?

JOHN JACKSON: We actually had a bigger population then than they have now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm, because of the railroad?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Um, so yeah. We had palm trees, and we had a Grinch. I was teaching fifth grade. One of my kids was the Grinch. Um, um, I had an adult approach me in years later and tell me she was -- she would've been in kindergarten. She was a snowflake. So we -- from then on, she was known as "Snowflake."

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: I got a lot of help. I was -- they just needed somebody to call the director. I actually got a lot of help from the music teacher, Twyla Coughlin. She was a very good music teacher. She was -- she was -- she was actually the music teacher, and she also had the high school cheerleaders, maybe not the cheerleaders, but she had a, um, pep --

KAREN BREWSTER: Pep group.

JOHN JACKSON: Pep group. What'd they call 'em?

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, did they have a --

JOHN JACKSON: Drill team.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: They called them the drill team, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Because they had a basketball team?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did they have a football team?

JOHN JACKSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, just basketball.

JOHN JACKSON: Just basketball. Track.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Cross country.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it must've been a pretty --

JOHN JACKSON: And I don't think they had girls' basketball then. No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Probably not.

JOHN JACKSON: No, it was drill team.

[01:28:17]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, but yeah, that the school was big enough in the mid-'70's to have that many programs and opportunities.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. I had -- our class sizes were twenty to thirty, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Each grade level.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Um.

[01:28:41]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, so why did you end up, um, no longer working for the park?

JOHN JACKSON: They were all just seasonal jobs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, yeah. They really didn't offer anything in the winter time.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so, you went to work for the railroad?

JOHN JACKSON: Years later, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: I started out with the railroad in '88.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Well, yeah. So --

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: There's a gap -- so you worked with the -- working on the buildings in the early '80's.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. I think my last -- my last -- I got laid off in August of '85. We finished up the job we were doing, and let's see. Was that? Yeah. Then I did a couple things on my own. I tore down a couple buildings, small buildings. Just stuff on my own or with friends.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, to get me through the summer. [01:29:46]Um, in -- I left town in fall of '86. Went to -- ended up in -- I went to Florida first and lived -- to live with my brother, and I worked there. And then that spring, I moved to Baltimore and worked in Baltimore for, mm, about eight months. That would've been April of '87.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And worked in Baltimore 'til March of '88. And I headed back to Alaska, um, and the railroad opened.

[01:30:34]KAREN BREWSTER: Why did you decide to go back to Alaska?

JOHN JACKSON: 'Cause I really didn't like Baltimore.

KAREN BREWSTER: You missed Skagway?

JOHN JACKSON: I don't -- yeah. Yeah. And uh, I knew I could find work there, and it was springtime, so. But the railroad opened, and I'd -- I was able to get hired to be the dispatcher for the first year of the railroad, and then I became a brakeman and eventually an engineer, and it was -- turned into my longest career.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And you retired with them, huh?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

[01:31:19]KAREN BREWSTER: So you -- you -- I mean, being dispatch is on-the-job -- were they all sort of on-the-job training? Dispatch, brakeman, and engineer?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. Yeah. For engineer, I was -- I was conductor. They actually sent us to school.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: In Kansas City, and that would've been in '90 -- spring of '98. We got to go to the, um, Kansas City -- we did a -- probably just one week of classes with simulators and a real engineer teaching the class.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: About locomotive operation.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: But mostly -- mostly it was on-the-job training, which is still what they do today.

KAREN BREWSTER: Really?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

[01:32:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, it's not like you go to college and get a degree in train engineering.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right. But the big railroads now have programs that are, you know, months long for training conductors and engineers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: But that's not the case on the White Pass. Everybody is taught on the job.

[01:32:29]KAREN BREWSTER: And um, what does the brakeman do?

JOHN JACKSON: The brakeman is one of two people on the train, just um, helping collect tickets. Mostly there for safety of the passengers, operation of the train. The train movements. Um, throwing switches, making sure -- putting us on the right track. Moving cars. Putting trains together.

KAREN BREWSTER: So in that job, you probably learned a lot just about the whole train operations and how the company worked?

JOHN JACKSON: Sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: And all that stuff.

JOHN JACKSON: Sure. Sure. Um, my first year dispatching when the railroad opened, we just had -- my office was in -- upstairs in the shops.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And I couldn't see out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, no.

JOHN JACKSON: I inhaled a lot of diesel fumes.

[01:33:22]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. How do you dispatch without being able to see?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, no. It's just all radio, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: And we'd give -- they -- people would come get their train orders in the morning. I'd write those out.

KAREN BREWSTER: And there probably weren't too many trains going --

JOHN JACKSON: There weren't.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- back and forth at that time?

JOHN JACKSON: We only had two crews of, uh, three people. Um, the -- when the railroad reopened in '88, they -- previously they'd had five-man train crews.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: They had an engineer and a fireman, and they had a conductor and a head end brakeman and a rear brakeman on every train. Well, when it reopened, they did away with the head end brakeman and the fireman. And so we had a three-man crew. And -- on passenger trains.

[01:34:17]KAREN BREWSTER: And these were all diesel trains by this point?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. We, um, our steam program began when we -- the 73, which is our -- is now the main steam engine, was in static display at Bennett.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

JOHN JACKSON: And it was there along with the rotary snowplow.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-ha.

JOHN JACKSON: And it was there when I was in my park years, hiking over the trail in '77. So I remember going -- and on the railroad, probably my first year as a brakeman, going up there and building extra track to bring that 73 back to town.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: And uh, where they started the restoration work on it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Why did it need different track?

JOHN JACKSON: Well, the -- it was on a static display on a separate piece of track.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: From the mainline. So they had to build a track.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, there was no connector?

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. I thought, if it was on a separate piece of track that the connection was still there.

JOHN JACKSON: No connection.

[01:35:30]KAREN BREWSTER: And then the rotary -- is that the rotary plow that's now down by the depot?

JOHN JACKSON: It's on -- it's on static display in Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And they've re -- where is the steam engine? I know the rotary is right down there by the old depot.

JOHN JACKSON: Well, right now, they've -- they've painted a really old steam engine, No. 2, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: And, uh, which used to be across the street from the depot. But they painted it, and they put it over there with the rotary.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: In static display behind the depot. South of the depot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: The 73 is -- Well, hopefully, it's back in town. They just -- they sent it out, I think, to totally rework the boiler.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: Because it was time. So they'd had no steam service last year.

[01:36:22]KAREN BREWSTER: So they still do steam service?

JOHN JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: The tourist train is now a steam-operated?

JOHN JACKSON: It's -- it's -- one of the trains. The current steam service is a, what they call the Fraser Loop.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: The steam train takes off, I don't know how often.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it's --

JOHN JACKSON: This year.

KAREN BREWSTER: One train out of their sched -- not one a day, maybe, but one out of their options.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Is steam?

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: But when you were working on it, was it -- was there a steam option?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. I became certified to fire and engineer the steam engine. I never really, really, really got to be the engineer.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And -- But I did quite a bit of firing.

[01:37:17]KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause that's a whole different way of operating a train than a diesel?

JOHN JACKSON: It's a different beast, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Especially on those hills, I would think.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, right. It's -- because you've got to watch the water in your boiler.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: On the hills. The water's all gonna -- so you got to make sure you have plenty of water in the boiler.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: So you're not expose the top of your --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, at the angle.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. You can't expose the crown sheet in the locomotive 'cause it'll scald it.

[01:37:49]KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. I was just thinking about having a hot enough fire going to have enough steam to get you up those hills.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Well, it was oil-fired.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Originally coal, but they converted it in '97 --

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: In '47, to oil.

KAREN BREWSTER: That makes it a little easier, right?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, well, I didn't have to shovel coal. There's that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: And it -- we burned a special oil that burns real hot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: And um, so yeah. It's -- it's pretty -- pretty cool.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that's very cool.

[01:38:24]JOHN JACKSON: And we started -- we -- they put the rotary snowplow back in service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

JOHN JACKSON: And we started taking that up and doing some clearing on the line. Oh gosh, early 2000's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And, originally, we used a couple of diesels to push it. The rotary has its own steam engines, and that just drives the wheel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: To plow the snow and throw it off to the side. The -- so it has to be pushed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: The original rotary fleet, back in the day --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: -- uh, used two steam engines to push the rotary. So they had, what, a nine-man crew?

[01:39:15]KAREN BREWSTER: I -- you, see, I assumed that the rotary was an engine in and of itself, and -- I didn't realize it had to be pushed by something else.

JOHN JACKSON: It does.

KAREN BREWSTER: Interesting.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: They're so cool, those old rotary things.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. There's some great photographs. We, uh -- the last time we had the rotary out was 2009, I think.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And we -- at that time we had, well, we still have the 69, which is another steam engine they acquired. They had -- it was originally on the White Pass. It got -- they sent it out, got rid of it, and then they -- it was sitting in a museum in Grand Island, Nebraska. And they got it back.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: And put it back together. And so that was one of -- that and the 73 were two engines that pushed the rotary in 2009, which was the last time we used it. And we went all the way to Bennett with it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Now, were you actually clearing snow with it?

JOHN JACKSON: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Going uphill?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Uphill, downhill.

[01:40:26]KAREN BREWSTER: Cool. 'Cause normally, the train doesn't operate in the winter anymore, does it?

JOHN JACKSON: No. And when they clear snow, they use bulldozers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

JOHN JACKSON: They use Cats, D6 Cats.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, the rotary originally in the construction of the railroad, they built snow sheds in areas that were particularly susceptible to drifting.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And there was like a mile of snow sheds, um, between Skagway and Bennett.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And they -- the snow shed covers the track so the snow --

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, it's like a lean-to over the track.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So the snow, if there's in an av -- a slide, or whatever, it goes over the tracks and not covering the tracks. In theory.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:41:18]JOHN JACKSON: So the -- in areas where the snow would be too deep for the rotary, it couldn't throw it to the side, right?

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: So that's why they had to have a snow shed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I see. Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: So um, but yeah. Originally, they had two -- two steam engines pushing the rotary.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

JOHN JACKSON: With a nine-man crew.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: There was a pilot. The rotary had a pilot, the person in the front --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: -- could peer out and see what they were -- and he was giving directions to his engineer and to the whole fleet of when to push forward.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: When to back up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, because --

JOHN JACKSON: They had whistle signals.

[01:41:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, because yeah, you probably, if there's a big drift, you'd have to kinda push in, dig through, come back out, push some more, dig through. You couldn't just keep going all the way through.

JOHN JACKSON: Right. Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause they get pretty hard-packed, those drifts.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, right. So the snow's gonna have different characters, depending on the weather and --

KAREN BREWSTER: Those pilots probably were pretty talented.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, they -- they, um -- when we were doing our operation, we brought -- brought in the old heads.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, cool.

JOHN JACKSON: Alvin Gordon. I think, is Alvin still with us? I think so.

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know. So he was an old pilot?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. Um, we brought in Jasper Sullivan. I think he lived in Haines, but he was on the rotary fleet back in the day. Um.

[01:42:56]KAREN BREWSTER: You know, since you switched over from the Park Service to White Pass, once you were with White Pass, it was, you know, now back running as a tourist operation, do you have any sense of what the relationship like -- was like between White Pass and the Park Service? Did they have things they worked together on or against each other on?

JOHN JACKSON: They -- there was -- at Bennett, we had interaction with the Park Service.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Coming up with interpretive programs for our guests of the railroad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: At one time, Christine (Hedgecock) and her colleagues --
KAREN BREWSTER: In Parks Canada?
JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. Would do a tour of the Bennett area. Have you been to Bennett?
KAREN BREWSTER: Um, not yet.
JOHN JACKSON: Ok.
KAREN BREWSTER: I will.
JOHN JACKSON: Good. It's beautiful. Bennett's a real special place.
[01:43:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Because the -- because the -- the Klondike Highway does not go through Bennett, correct?
JOHN JACKSON: That's correct.
KAREN BREWSTER: Yes. Um, ok.
JOHN JACKSON: So we had interaction there. And um, there -- any -- I mean, officially, I think there was cooperation. There were some, um -- there were some personal problems. Railroad employees that just didn't like the park and were not all that cooperative. Um, so there was that.
KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.
JOHN JACKSON: Um, but other than that -- I mean, often we would help the rangers bring in their -- pardon me. Their supplies. Often when the train's going into Bennett, we would meet the rangers with their supplies in Fraser.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.
JOHN JACKSON: At Mile 28. And um, their -- their most direct access to their camp was at the top of the hill above Bennett.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.
JOHN JACKSON: On the way in, and so we'd stop the train and unload their stuff there.
KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.
JOHN JACKSON: And, uh, so there was cooperation in that regard.
[01:45:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and -- and I don't know if you know when it started that, you know, hikers coming off the trail come to Bennett and take the train back to Skagway, and it seems fairly well coordinated.
JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.
KAREN BREWSTER: And I don't know how long that's happened, that it's a pretty coordinated schedule.
JOHN JACKSON: Right. Um, well that's -- that arrangement's been going on since I was there.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.
JOHN JACKSON: You know, we'd um --
KAREN BREWSTER: I didn't know if it used to --
JOHN JACKSON: The hikers could go to Bennett. Um, they could buy a meal there.
KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.
JOHN JACKSON: And get on the train.
[01:46:00]KAREN BREWSTER: I didn't know if it used to be more like a whistle stop, that hikers would just flag the train down?
JOHN JACKSON: Uh, no. No. Um, what we call whistle stops is on the, um, on the US side, between Skagway and White Pass.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And it was established pretty early on that hikers could get on and off the train at Denver, Mile 5.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And at Glacier, Mile 14. [01:46:38]And in recent years, well, more recent years, there's been a tour operator, Packer Expeditions.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

JOHN JACKSON: That arranged to bring their people on the train.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: You get on, and they, you know, bring lunch and everything. And they take their people to either Denver or Glacier, and then they get picked up later in the day.

KAREN BREWSTER: So they're sort of leading guided hikes for people out to those places?

JOHN JACKSON: That's correct. That's correct.

[01:47:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, didn't there used to be a way from Chilkoot that you could get to Fraser instead of going all the way to Bennett?

JOHN JACKSON: Um --

KAREN BREWSTER: And there were --

JOHN JACKSON: There's -- there may have been a trail to Fraser. Never established.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, no, no, but it's like a shortcut or uh, yeah. There's something that you didn't have to necessarily always go to Bennett. There was some other place. Maybe I'm thinking --

JOHN JACKSON: There was a cut-off.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: At Mile 37.5.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So it's not Fraser. Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And they -- recently, I think they got -- they put the kiboshes on that in like, 2013.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: 2012, 2013. They like, closed the trail, but people still used it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's what I was wondering, in that -- is that an issue between the park and the railroad?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause if people went there, how would they get the train? Or they hiked to the road?

JOHN JACKSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Is that -- I don't remember how that worked.

JOHN JACKSON: They would -- they would -- if they came out to 37.5, they'd just have to hike along the track out to Log Cabin.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Where the highway is.

[01:48:14]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And was that the issue, was having hikers along the track?

JOHN JACKSON: Uh, yes. Yeah. Um, in 2005, we um, did a lot of work on that track between Bennett and Log Cabin.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: And created more of a walkway alongside the track because we knew people were gonna walk that, whether they were told to not do it or not. So they did -- created more of a wider path.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: And it worked out pretty good.

[01:48:53]KAREN BREWSTER: And so, what year did you retire from White Pass?

JOHN JACKSON: 2015.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And then you guys moved down here?

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah, we originally went to Las Vegas, New Mexico, and rented a house and started looking around for a place to -- to be. And um, I'd been -- my sister moved here in 2006 from Mukilteo, Washington.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

JOHN JACKSON: Um, with my mother, so I started -- my mother's birthday was in March. I'd usually come down and help her celebrate her birthday right before I went to work on the railroad. And so, I was familiar with the area, and Su was able to come with me a couple times in the fall.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

JOHN JACKSON: So she was -- we were familiar enough with it that, um, when we saw it -- we came up to visit my sister in the summer of 2016 to see, wow. It's green here. And look at those mountains. "Well, we can do this."

KAREN BREWSTER: So you did --

JOHN JACKSON: And then we'd be near my sister, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you didn't want to stay in Skagway after retirement?

JOHN JACKSON: We wanted to be closer to family and be closer to medical, the same old story, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

JOHN JACKSON: Su was tired of the rain. She thought it was too rainy there.

[01:50:23]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, it sounds like Skagway was a good place for you. Would you say that?

JOHN JACKSON: Yes. Oh, yeah. Yep. I had a very happy life there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

JOHN JACKSON: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, is there anything else that you want to talk about, either Park Service, White Pass, that I haven't asked about? You've had a while to think about this interview, so I don't know if you thought about things.

JOHN JACKSON: Yeah. I really haven't had any more luck coming up with -- memories, especially from the park days. My railroad memories are more recent. I would like to think that I could go on about that, but --

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, we could --

JOHN JACKSON: I don't think we really need to add anything.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. I mean, we could take a break if you think of something else.

JOHN JACKSON: How about lunch?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that sounds good.

JOHN JACKSON: And -- and let's be done.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.