

**Andrew Beierly**  
**NPS Skagway Oral History Project**  
**Skagway, Alaska**  
**December 8, 2009**  
**Interviewed by Stacey Carkhuff**

**Stacey Carkhuff:** This is Stacey Carkhuff interviewing Andrew Beierly. We're in Skagway, Alaska and it is December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and this is for the Skagway Oral History Project []. So Andrew we'll start with a little bit about your history, where you're from and how did you get to Skagway?

**Andrew Beierly:** Okay, I was born in Juneau, Alaska at the Native Hospital on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1940. Um, lived in Juneau until 1954 and, ah [] and went to the Pious the Tenth Catholic School.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** And why did you decided or your family decide to move to Skagway?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, no I was ah sent by um, I guess it was by the Welfare department in Juneau to go to the Pious Tenth Mission School.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So it was just you that went?

**Andrew Beierly:** [] my brother came here first in ah, 1953 and then I came here in '54.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** And what is your brother's name?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, Pete yeah.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So now that you mentioned going to the Pious Mission, it was the Catholic run organization, what was that like attending that school?

**Andrew Beierly:** It was ah, [] then you know just going to school in Juneau and living at home and doing whatever I wanted to do. And then when I went to the mission they had things that they expected us to do. Um, so it was different, but it was good.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So then when that school closed down you transferred over to Skagway High school?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes in '59 [] the sisters of St. Ann's took over the Pious Tenth Mission and ah, so then they decided to close, close the mission. So there was a family in town, Bill Ferrow and Bev Ferrow that ah, owned the Sourdough Inn and they asked me if I wanted to work for them and stay with them. It worked for them [] and I finished high school there at Skagway high school.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** It was really nice of them.

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes it was, it was good for me um, um, because it gave me a chance to graduate from high school and also work for them. So I was really grateful for them taking me in.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So um, when did you start working for the railroad?

**Andrew Beierly:** I um [] railroad in 1957 ah, seasonal. I worked on the section.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** And what does one do while working on the section?

**Andrew Beierly:** On the section either changed ties, lined tracks, ah, ah or just um, just level the rail. [] and at that time everything was done by hand, you had to tamp the ties and spike and line the track and things like that, that section-mended.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** SO it was quite laborious work?

**Andrew Beierly:** Oh yes it was! It hard work but good for you []

**Stacey Carkhuff:** [] at that point?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes I was seventeen.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** And then you stayed with the railroad and so you switched jobs. What did you move onto next?

**Andrew Beierly:** Um, and then ah, 19ah, 58 no 59 I went and worked on the bridge crew. Building the bridge, so I learned how to do carpentry work and []. We worked on bridges from Skagway all the way to Whitehorse.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** What was working on a bridge like? Was it different than working on the regular track?

**Andrew Beierly:** It was different for you know I remember one time we were working on the steel bridge, which they no longer use. And that's on seventeen and a half or eighteen mile and I did a lot of spiking. [] and usually you'd take one step, well I took one step and went in-between the ties because there was no dirt there. So it was different. But I liked it. I liked working with wood, yeah.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Okay. So why don't they use the steel bridges anymore?

**Andrew Beierly:** Um, the steel bridge [] I forget what year; ah it might have been in the '60s. A lot of the stringers and a lot of the ah, I can't even think of it, ah ...

**Stacey Carkhuff:** the parts that make up the bridge?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yeah it's the parts that make up the bridge. It's the post and they're called [] they were starting to rot and they called it a pony wall or something like that where we cut the bottom of the beams off and then put another section underneath it. And the whole bridge was slowly starting to rot away. And then of course in, in the '60s they started hauling ore so the bridge was not strong enough [] to hold the weight of the ore that was brought down.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So then after the steel bridges what did you build bridges out of?

**Andrew Beierly:** They ah, what they did was when they started to haul all the ore down from Whitehorse they um, reinforced all, most all the bridges with steel, steel stringers and um, to strengthen

them up so they could haul the ore down from Whitehorse. And I believe at that time they had one container on it which was supposed to haul twenty tons. And then eventually they changed them to two containers, smaller containers, and so that was, I believe it was forty tons per car. So they had to beef up all the bridges []. And then they quit using the bridges up at seventeen or seventeen-and-a-half mile. And they put a tunnel through

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Oh okay

**Andrew Beierly:** and then they put a new bridge in.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So did they have to blast the tunnel out of bedrock?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes, yes they did. And ah, if you get a chance [] rail all the way up, they go to Fraser and then you can see how much work they had done to strengthen up the walls all along the railroad, that the army had put in when they had taken hold of the railroad in the '40s.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** The army really wore the railroad out hauling goods?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yeah well they hauled all their equipment [] ALCAN highway, you know because if you look at some old pictures in the '40s that they were hauling a lot of their trucks and graders up to Whitehorse then to work on the ALCAN.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So after doing um, [] so after doing the bridge work after you did the sections, what job did you move onto?

**Andrew Beierly:** And then I went into the Army.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Oh okay,

**Andrew Beierly:** In 1963 to ah, 65 or 66 and then I came back and worked for ah, White Pass they gave me my job []. I worked on the section and then I got back and worked on the B&B again. And then ah, '67 I went and started working in the car shop on the freight cars. And then in '68 I went to, transferred to diesel mechanic helper [] went to work for, and then I transferred again and started working in the car shop. And ah, well actually I went from B&B to Diesel Mechanic helper. And then went to the car shop and worked on freight cars. And then eventually, ah, in late '60s [] the carpenter that was working on the passenger cars until then he retired. And then when he retired I started working on passenger cars, restoring them or if they were in a wreck, did a lot of the carpentry work. I remember there was a car 214 that ah flew off the track and it wiped out one whole side of the passenger car and I rebuilt it. And I rebuilt it the same way that they built it in the 1800s.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Wow

**Andrew Beierly:** Used the same material um, all the studs were made out of oak and ah, part of the roof was made out of fir. They used a lot of different types of wood. They used the fir for the beams and then oak for the studs and fir for the roof and also cedar, cedar and basswood. And so but they built them to last.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Yeah they did.

**Andrew Beierly:** Yeah

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Are those trees all native to Alaska or did they have to ship them in?

**Andrew Beierly:** No most of the material that I used to restore that one car, we ordered it and it was shipped up [].

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So we'll rewind a little bit and have you talk a little bit about your work as a diesel mechanic helper.

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Um, did you start doing that when they switched over to diesel or had they already switched over?

**Andrew Beierly:** They had already switched over. And when I came here in 1954 they got their first diesel.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Okay

**Andrew Beierly:** And so, they used the steam engine as a helper when they were hauling the load up [] that was the steepest grade on the railroad. And then the steam engine would disconnect and head back to Skagway. And it was neat to see that, you know. Hear them running up the mountain, you know.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Did you ever have any preference as to which type of engine was running?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, not really, you know, I'm glad that the White Pass does have two steam engines here [] running and the whistle blowing. It's pretty neat.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So then after being a diesel mechanic helper you transferred over to the shops? What did you do there?

**Andrew Beierly:** There I learned to work on the passenger, freight cars ah, the air system, the brakes, the trucks, I learned how to work on them. You know it was good. I enjoyed working on them, yeah. And a lot of them um, some of the flat cars came from Hawaii. They were sugar cane flat cars and they called them Army. Some of the other cars were, the old cars were made of wood frame and steel center beams and there's a [] that lives in Skagway that does, that has the history of the White Pass and Yukon Railroad. And I'm sure that you have probably talked to him and that is Karl Muvhill

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Un-huh

**Andrew Beierly:** And so I kind of helped him with ah, if he's making drawing of the cabooses or cars that I've worked on ah, I help him and then he gives me a little history where the car [] where White Pass bought them from and stuff.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** That's interesting that all that information has been preserved.

**Andrew Beierly:** Oh yes, especially for him because he takes so many pictures of the White Pass and ah, a lot of the steam engines that came here when the army was here. He knows a lot of the history of why the army quit using them and things. And then they were shipped out [] which was too bad because it had some history of the railroad, but it was just taking up space in the shop and so they decided to scrap them all.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Hmm

**Andrew Beierly:** Yeah

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So after the restoration work that you did, was there any other positions that you held with the White Pass?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, and then I became a [] so I had ah, around eight or twelve people working under me. And then in the late '60s when the railroad switched for the ore cars instead of one tear drop container, that's what they called them, and then they went to two. So then they remodeled [] be able to hold the two containers and they had around 15 to 16 people working on those to redesign the flat cars.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So you designed them here?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, no um, there was ah, ah a guy from down south I can't remember where he was from, but he designed it and then it sent the drawings to White Pass. And then we took the drawings and cut the steel and put new beams in and new supports for the containers. And ah, so ... and then ah, we had this one welder that was Don Meeville, he took the drawings and he took a flat car [] and designed it himself and it held up a lot better than the one that the engineers had designed. And ah, the engineer came up to Skagway and he saw this one flatcar and he asked well what the ... how come that flatcar wasn't rebuilt to his design or whoever made the design? I told him the story I told him it was holding [] a lot better than the ones that they designed. And it was a lighter car so ... yeah.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** And his name was Don Meeville?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes, yes and he has passed away. He passed away here in Skagway. He was from Vermont.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** There were a lot of people that came to work on the railroad that were from Vermont, weren't there?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes it was! It was amazing you know [] people and some of the people knew each other but there were quite a few that didn't know them but there were a lot of people from Vermont. You know either a section hands and engineers and brake men and there are still a few that worked for the railroad that came up here in the [].

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Why do you think so many people came up from Vermont?

**Andrew Beierly:** I really don't know. And there was one friend of mine and his name was Dick Brown. They were going to go up to Anchorage or Fairbanks and they stopped in Skagway and he went down and asked for a job at White Pass and he got a job. he was a brakeman. [] went to work for the park service as a carpenter.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So was there anything else that you wanted to mention about your time with the railroad?

**Andrew Beierly:** The railroad, hmm, they were good to me you know. I liked working for them.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So then the railroad shut down in [] and then where did you go from there?

**Andrew Beierly:** From there I got a job down in Juneau setting up trailers. And I worked for them for about a month-and-a-half or two months and then they ah, the Park Service had an emergency hire to shim all the walls and ceilings at the depot [] building. So I worked doing that for a month.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So you said that you were rebuilding the inside of the Administrative Building at the depot?

**Andrew Beierly:** Well what we were doing, the electricians the studs were all rough cut studs so the walls weren't flat so we had to take sheet rock [] and every foot run it across the walls, back and forth, back and forth. And then take paper shims and staple them on all the studs that weren't sticking out the same or not level we had to staple them on. We had to do that to the ceilings and the walls like I said. And once we had done that we were laid off. Ah, and actually I did that before that was in February. I did that before I went down to Juneau. Um, and ah, once the job was done we were laid off. We were only thirty day emergency hire for that job. And you know there was no heat in the building and it was during February you know and that's a cold, cold month. And so we had to wear our winter clothes shimming the walls and the ceiling.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Oh that must have been []

**Andrew Beierly:** Oh it was it, it was cold you know. And it had heaters in there but it didn't warm it up to like 55 degrees and it was still below 45.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Oh

**Andrew Beierly:** Yeah

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So after that stint with the Park Service you came back to work for them full time.

**Andrew Beierly:** And I came back and worked as a seasonal carpenter. I was work leader, carpenter[] and that's when we started to ah, do all the finish work in the building, sheet rock, wayne's coating and mudding, all those type of jobs cause to finish up a building.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Did you have to go to any special classes?

**Andrew Beierly:** No most of that at first [] no I didn't cause I just doing stuff for White Pass learning how to build doors, windows, I did that on my own or I got books and looked and read on how to do it. So this um, the guy by the name of Mike Caulluer and myself, we built most of all the doors to the [] and built doors for the Administrative building and the Depot, Visitors Center is when we built all of those and we built windows and then the person that I mentioned before he and I put all the wall paper on the building, on the depot, on the Visitor's Center. So he knew how to do it and then I learned from him how to put on the wall paper.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Un-huh, cause the building is very attractive.

**Andrew Beierly:** Oh yes! I, I enjoyed going over there and looking at the building. And my work that was done on the building still looks just as good as when I first did it, so. And I have ah, the house that I lived in, was I've seen pictures July 1898 and ah, [] so I tried to keep it the same way it looked but I do modernize the things in it and do a little bit of changing. And then I also worked on a house across the street that used to be, that used to belong to White Pass that was built in 1905. And that was their housing for their accountants and engineers. So I tried to keep it looking the same way on the outside.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Right, did you find it difficult to restore the buildings to their late 1890's?

**Andrew Beierly:** No I didn't. I you know like I said I just went by the drawings and I just went by that and just followed them. And the architect that drew all the drawing was an excellent, easy to follow. I really liked his drawings and such to go by. And his name was Dave Snow and he still works for the Park Service in Denver Service Center, I believe.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Un-huh and you worked for the Park Service all the way up to 2003?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes, yes I started out as a work leader and then that was seasonal so they said. And ah, then I went to, there was a job that opened up as a custodian which was a pretty large drop in pay but it was year round plus it was, you got benefits whereas seasonal work doesn't get benefits. So I applied for that job and got it. And then so I worked as a custodian until ah, '90 ah, in the '90s and then I was finally promoted from custodian to a maintenance mechanic. So I took care of the [] boilers there, the sprinkler systems and did the carpentry work, all the buildings that the park service owned.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So did you ever have any experiences where you were doing carpentry and you found something historical in the buildings or something carved into the wall or anything like that []?

**Andrew Beierly:** Well the only one where we were restoring one room up on the second floor of the depot um, they used some of their purchase orders and stuff that they stuffed in-between the windows and studs for to keep the wind out. But there is some of the, as you go down the stairwell there in the depot [] there is some writing on the walls. But Karl Gurkey knows because he had taken pictures.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So you also enjoyed working for the Parks Service?

**Andrew Beierly:** Oh yes! I really enjoyed working for them because it was working with carpentry, with wood and [] to build doors that were built in 1800s you know on the railroad, opened up. (Cough) Excuse me.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Anything else that you'd like to mention about your work with the Park Service?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, just that I enjoyed working for them and I enjoyed working with the people of the park service [] because there was a lot of them that came here as seasonal worker and interpreters and people that worked on the trail or crew. They are good people.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** That's a common theme

**Andrew Beierly:** Yeah

**Stacey Carkhuff:** People really like working for the government here.

**Andrew Beierly:** Oh yes... and they hired a lot of people that [] the road shut down you know they had at least 15 people, or workers working on the depot and the administrative building.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** And since you've retired in 2003 have you done any volunteer work or anything in the park service?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, I don't do any [] and if they have any questions on the buildings because I was, I was a work leader and was maintenance mechanic. I had to look over all the drawings with my supervisor John Warder and see if there was anything that I thought that needed to be changed with the drawings before they started doing [] work on the building. So that gave me a chance to look at the drawings and see where everything was being put. So anytime that they, cause I just live right across the street from the maintenance facility and I always go over there and talk with them and see what is going on with them at the Park Service. And if they have any questions, I'm just glad to [] what's in the walls and stuff, or if I have pictures that I have taken during restoration I usually just give them to the park for their archives. And it helps the maintenance people that are working on the buildings to see what is behind the walls.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** So you took lots of pictures?

**Andrew Beierly:** Lots of pictures, you know and every, ah, August I'd take pictures of it's called either Witch Mountain or Saddle Mountain see how much the glacier has receded since the sixties so that's my record of the glacier receding in Skagway.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Hmm have you always []?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes I have, I have my own dark room equipment but no place to set it up. But ah, so I took a class on how-to develop black-and-white film and how to expose pictures so. There's still a lot I don't know about [] digital cameras. But I'm learning. So now, since my wife is a birder I take a lot of pictures of birds (ha).

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Have you ever found, some people have a bird that they just have to see, does your wife chase birds to try to see them?

**Andrew Beierly:** No we usually take a drive you know down to the waterfront or to Cullen Creek or to Dyea or to see if there's any birds that are you know that come here that you don't usually see here. So I usually have my camera with me and take pictures of it and hope that they turn out. You know sharp enough to make prints.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Un-huh

**Andrew Beierly:** And then like the white bear that was here that people were talking about when it was shot [] I don't know if it's the same bear that I was [] lucky enough to get, to get a couple pictures of it.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Was it an albino bear or just?

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes but the nose was black and the rest of the body was kind of ah, not white, white but kind of white.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Hmm that's interesting.

**Andrew Beierly:** Yeah, but some people have seen it and have excellent pictures of it you know [] too busy doing something else and not driving around trying to chase the bear down (ha) to get pictures of it. But there's more bears that are coming to Skagway or Dyea and Skagway. The black bears are coming to Skagway and the brown bears over in Dyea, because, I think part of it is because the pink salmon return in August, where years ago we didn't have [] salmon coming to Skagway until they started the hatchery.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Oh,

**Andrew Beierly:** The Skagway School started the Hatchery so you get more pink salmon. And then you also have the King Salmon that come back every five years that the school, I can't remember if that's the school or the city that has that now, so but they're returning. So ... [] forest service recommends to bring them back. Because there weren't that many salmon caught here in Skagway as far as the wild King Salmon. And there wasn't that many boats, because when I came here in '54 there were only two people I think that had fishing boats. And they were the only two that went out, yeah.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Do people do, or did people do [] sports fishing here when you were younger?

**Andrew Beierly:** No, I don't think so. They didn't have it ah, they didn't well maybe some people did because the, ah, the dog salmon came up to Pony Creek and they went up Dyea. And they still go over to Dyea but there's not as many as there was years ago. And Pony Creek there isn't that many []. I don't know if it's because they changed the creek or there just being fished out and they just don't return to Skagway but they used to.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Well on a final note, you mentioned that you play in a band called Four Over Fifty

**Andrew Beierly:** (ha) Oh yes, there's a, there's a lead guitar Stan Summer [] and Si Dennis and his wife Cheryl. And um, we have Ted which just joined our band probably two, three years ago. And then we have another person that plays saxophone and he joined us two years ago. But at first, when we first started out, we were just going to jam. We didn't play for dances or anything just, just [] so it was Stan Si, Cheryl and myself we were all over fifty years old so we decided to call our band Four Over Fifty. And we play songs from the fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties and some newer ones. But I enjoy playing just to play. And I just play chords, I can't play [] guitar but that's okay.

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Hmm, well is there anything else that you'd like to mention?

**Andrew Beierly:** Ah, just like everybody else that, the newcomers that come to Skagway, ask how much Skagway has changed and it has, to me it has changed a lot. When I first came in '54 [] the streets had mountain ash right next to the curb. And there were more trees in town, around town. And ah, and when we didn't get as many tourist ships as we get now. Before there was just a few. I can't remember the names of the tourist ships that used to come in here []. So that part has changed quite a bit and beside Broadway the new buildings that are being put up which, which proves that Broadway and the historic ah, ... in Skagway that makes sure that any building that is put up on Broadway looks historic and so [] and not just putting up a building that doesn't look like the era of the Gold Rush. Yes

**Stacey Carkhuff:** That's good that it's regulated.

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes it is. It is. Sometimes you think that it's over but that's good at least the City has control what goes on Broadway []

**Stacey Carkhuff:** Well thank you for coming in this morning

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes,

**Stacey Carkhuff:** ...to do this interview.

**Andrew Beierly:** Yes

**Stacey Carkhuff:** I appreciate it.

**Andrew Beierly:** Okay, thank you.

**Notations:**

[] indicates gap in replay

\*\*\* indicates the recording was garbled