

Steve Hites
National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Oral History Project
Skagway, Alaska
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Stacey Baldrige: Today is May 10th, 2010. This is Stacey Baldrige interviewing Steve Hites with Karen Brewster on camera. This is for the Skagway Oral History Project and we are in Skagway, Alaska at the Skagway Theater. So if you could just start out telling us how you came to Alaska, where you're from, and a little bit about your job.

Steve Hites: I'm *** I grew up in Colorado in the southwestern corner of Cortez mountains Durango, Colorado. It was all 14,000 foot peaks and old mines and narrow gauge railroads. And ah, and I loved growing up with the story of Automeer's *** and the Rio Grande, the David Moffett Building, The Denver and Salt Lake, about the Reco Argentine Mine and I thought that was what everybody did. We moved to Ft. Collins. My Father got a job over there. He's a doctor, general practice and then I realized how very rare the mountains really were when you got to the plains of the big cities like Denver and I decided I wanted to work on the railroad as soon as I got out of high school. And I graduated and I went to work on the Colorado and Southern on the extra-tie gang. And put in twenty-five miles of ties between Boulder and or between Westminster and Nilewatt, Colorado. And I watched those trains rolling by and those guys in the caboose waving at you with their sunglasses [] coke and reading the Denver Post and we're out there in 110 degrees putting in the railroad ties. And I say I want that job. They weren't hiring in the operating department but I was thinking about going to work on the trains and I went into the travel agency with my Mother who was going on a trip somewhere. It was over the weekend and there on the wall was the brochure rack and there was a brochure that said, "Come north where the world is young." And it had a picture of a beautiful little narrow gauge passenger train [] surrounded by glaciers. I didn't know where it was but it turns out it was at Ptarmigan Point milepost 30 on the White Pass and Yukon route. And it was taken back in the fifties and it was a very old publicity photograph but it said on it White Pass Yukon Railroad and I said wow. I had heard about it because back in the World War II the US army had requisitioned a bunch of narrow gauge off the White Pass and it had taken [] to the Alaska Highway, building the CANOL Pipeline building the *** and I knew the name White Pass and Yukon. And I said wow it's actually running and it's actually a place I could go work so I announced to my Mother that I was going to go north and work the White Pass Railroad. And she said, "You don't even know how to wash your socks, how are you going to?" And I said I'm going. So I loaded the car up and announced to the, I had two weeks' notice [] it was coming up towards the first week of September. I had been accepted to college in Spokane, Washington and I thought maybe I'd go to school, I had no clue. My parents had made me stop, "on your way to the ferry in Seattle [] because you're taking the car, you're going north, you're going to Alaska so on your way would you stop and look at this college?" And I said sure, I'm going to Skagway, Alaska. And I'm going to work on this railroad,

and I've got money in my pocket and my guitar and my bicycle and I drove off. And I stopped at Spokane [] and I went to see them. I know I'm on your list of people that is supposed to pay you to go to school here but I'm on my way to Alaska. And she said well there is one other kid here that is from Alaska. Your age, first year, a freshman, I'll introduce you to him just in case and maybe he can talk you into staying. But maybe he can talk you into staying but I know you're on your way to Skagway, Alaska at the first of September. And I went and introduced to this kid and walked into this room and he says "Hi, I'm Dean Warner and I'm from Skagway, Alaska." And I said well I'm on my way there to get work on the railroad. And he says well you won't get any work, they've cut all the crews and another week from now everybody's going to be out of work. And he said I worked for the railroad last year and my Dad works for the railroad. I wouldn't recommend going up right now because you'd sit around on your rear end and you'd freeze your ass off. And there wouldn't be anything for you to do, and you'd get depressed, and you'd be sad you'd leave, and that happens a lot of people that come up without a plan. Why don't you hang around with me [] for a semester and you can come up with me to Alaska at the end of the semester we'll go up there for Christmas and we'll put in our application for the railroad. If you want you can stay if they hire you. I went north with Dean in December and landed here on the 19th of December of 1972 in the middle of a good blizzard and the railroad was right there, the ferry terminal, we were the only people on the ferry it was the Matanuska, and when we got off the snow was blowing like no business and it had gotten dark and a couple Christmas lights were in one of the windows at the liquor store and one other building and the narrow gauge freight cars were getting switched around the yard, full of lead zinc concentrate from the Cyprus Anvil Mine and I said my god its Colorado 1958 all over again. This time I'm old enough to be here, this time I've actually got a chance to live what happens and I put in an application. And I worked a dozen or so odd jobs; I washed dishes of the Golden North Hotel. Ah, I worked twelve jobs the first week and then I was in town in Skagway. I didn't get hired on the railroad until I was hired as a baggage boy for the White Pass and Yukon. Prior to that I had worked my way up to where I was the assistant manager of the Golden North Hotel. And I was 18 years old. The amazing thing to me was that you could do just about anything if you were a warm body. If you could show up on time and do the job you could do anything. So I was working the job. I had a red vest and I had a little gold chain that I put across and a little shoe string tie. I had a little tiny like hat that I would wear. I was the only person wearing a costume except inside [] the guy that was running the newspaper at the time, took a picture of me In front of the bank and said, "Local character Steve Hites works for Golden North Hotel. Wears costume!" you know. And ah, he these poor people had tickets to take a sightseeing tour issued by the sightseeing company in Oregon. I'd never been on a tour in my life except with old Nova Warner who started showing me around and they said we've got a sightseeing tour. We didn't have a bus that was working yet. I took them and put them in my '65 Ford station wagon and put them in there and I got the kid who was the dishwasher who had replaced me, he was twelve years old, pulled him out and he had been dish washing, I had him sit beside me. He had been born in Skagway. We would drive and I would say, "Here is the Red Onion Saloon" and I'd kind of do like this (nudge with elbow) and he'd say, "Red Onion Saloon was a bordello and women had rooms upstairs and they had dolls. And the dolls on their backs, if the woman was being used and they'd set it upright if woman was available." "And over here we have the White Pass Yukon Railroad station." "The Railroad Station is from the Gold Rush days and it used to be where the Administrator's and the President's office is in there." And I could kind of do this (nudge with elbow) kind of hit the kid and we did the first whole tour

with him being like my ventriloquist doll sitting. And with these people and they'd give you five bucks tip and I'd give it to Roy, Roy Nelson is the young man who helped me do that so that was my tour of town. I went to Nova afterwards, Nova Warner who I was renting a room from and he took me around that and he drove me around all over town and in all the back alleys and up the hill and out to Dyea and he walked me out and that was the first time I saw the false front I was with Nova. He took me back and we bushwhacked back into the trees. The old Dyea cemetery was back there too in those days before it had to be moved. Um, and [] there used to be a saloon that was over there that was upright that was still there. There were three or four other buildings in Dyea, the Pullen House Barn from her Dairy Farm was still standing, the Matthews cabin was still standing. And there were many structures still standing in Dyea in 1973 that I got a chance to explore with Nova and he told me about World War II and about the Army. He'd come and he'd been up at Norman Wells at Ft. Norman and he'd come down in 1948 and so that is where he met of course his wife to be who was a nurse at the White House Hospital. And anyway I got my first tour experience from those guys and decided that tours were fun. And I gave tours the rest of the summer until I got hired as a baggage boy on the White Pass Railroad for two dollars and fifty cents an hour. I had been making five bucks an hour and it was big money. I took a cut in pay to go work for the railroad and load suitcases. [] pretty simple really because you know you went in every Monday to get a job and Jackie Bud was the Superintendent's Secretary. And Jackie would be sitting there at this table and you'd go in and you'd say "Hi Jackie." "Hi Steve." Because we were on a first name basis by now because I was in every Monday. "Any work this week, does it look like there will be any jobs?" "Doesn't look like it any jobs on the railroad this week, Steve." "Ah, thank you Jackie. I've got my bags here from the hotel. I'll unload them and get them out there for the train." "Okay have a great week." I went out there to see Jackie on my regular Monday and I'm saying goodbye to put the bags on the platform and I hear this voice from another place, "What do you mean the baggage boys quit?" And it was the Superintendent of the railroad Ed Hanisack, Big Ed, Ed Jr. is Superintendent now, his son. And everybody was...Big Ed was twelve feet tall and weighed five hundred pounds and was this entity. When he walked into the room people cowered. [] on chairs around "what do you mean" and suddenly he was in the room and Jackie was like (cowering) this. And Ed was like, "Where the hell am I going to find a baggage boy at 9:30 in the morning for the 10:00 train?" and I said, "Right here." And he turned his big search light eyes and he said, "Who the hell are you?" I said "I'm the best son-of-a-bitch you'll ever hire. Well, get out and load that train." And I loaded box car single-handedly and we only left fifteen minutes late and I had the first job on the White Pass and Yukon railroad. I left the company after being a brakeman, conductor, train dispatcher, passenger agent, and assistant manager as a manager of the passenger services for the brand new passenger railroad that was just reopening. The year I left we had carried a hundred thousand people and that [] one hundred thousand people and then I'd leave. We'd re-evaluate whether I was going to stay. And they had grown to the point that they had a dedicated person, because I was still running my business. I'm working for these guys on the side (ha ha) "sure I'll start your railroad, I've got my own family business." "Okay we'll make a deal with the devil." So they of course have grown on to other things, the Scenic Railway of the World is the most popular attractions and the most successful and profitable railroad, tourist railroad in North America per passenger per mile basis and ah I'll tell you it is one of the most wonderful adventures I've ever had. And I wouldn't trade it for anything. But ah, I'm very happy every time I hear the whistle blow and those guys going down the street out there. What else do you got on your list?

Stacey Baldrige: Well um, [] business what gave you the idea and kind of propelled you to continue the business? Was it just that successful or did you think that it would become successful?

Steve Hites: Well Martin Itjen had passed away in 1942. Martin of course ah, we tell the story of Martin on our street car tour. And if you guys were to take the tours with the girls in the yellow buses, we actually do [] street car tour. They have to listen to me give it because I have, you know, I have the story down now. And it has always been done orally it has never been written down. We tell about how Martin emigrated from Germany to do Jacksonville, FL. Heard about the gold rush, came north, passed through Skagway went up and looked for gold in Atland. And actually found a claim but the mining lot changed and so he lost his claim but he liked Skagway enough and he worked for the railroad [] he had a dozen odd jobs around town. He brought his wife Lucy up. He became the local undertaker *** deliverer and coal delivery man in town and with his coal delivery truck he actually brought in some of the first larger vehicles in town. That was what Martin was doing in 1923 when President Harding passed through on his three hour visit to Skagway on his US Naval *** Henderson. The presidential party was here for just three [] basically they were on their way up to drive the last spike in the government railroad [] and with him of course was Herbert Hoover who would eventually be, he was Secretary of Commerce at the time but he would eventually be president. But there were very few cars in town and the word went out, everybody bring your cars to the dock and pick up the party coming off the ship. Martin took his coal truck, swept it out and painted it bright colors like a circus wagon and painted Skagway Street Car on it like a joke and drove it down and picked up President Harding [] motorized tour of Skagway. They ended up at the Pullen House where Harding gave a speech. They went down to the Arctic Brotherhood where he became an honorary member, the last member of the Arctic Brotherhood. And then Virginia Berfield and her sister picked up the President in their little sree and actually rode him around and back to the dock. Virginia tells stories about that, or used to tell those before she passed away. So Harding was here, liked the tour and Martin says I'm onto something [] and he drove the Skagway Street Car. In 1935 he did a very well publicized trip to California to see Mae West. This was documented in over 250 newspapers in the western United States as well as the New York Times and several Eastern papers that carried the blurb. It was pretty simple, Martin had seen the movie with Mae West and Cary Grant where she goes, "Why don't you come up and see me sometime." And [] why I don't go down and see you. Loads the street car up, puts it on the steamer, unloads it and ends up in Seattle thinking he's going to go down and see Mae West. And he says this to a newspaper reporter for the Alaskan Weekly that runs a story you know. One of those odd things, Alaskan Sourdough first visits outside since Gold Rush with odd street car is going to go to Hollywood to date Mae West. There was a man at the Paramount named Don Wood [] an agent, he was a PR guy read about this went down to see Martin at the Washington Hotel in today's Pioneer Square and actually convinced Martin that he'd be his agent and he split the deal fifty-fifty whatever they would make. Woods got Martin jobs doing oleos in all the movie theaters down the west coast. You park the street car in front of the movie theater, Martin would stand out front smiling, people [] and then in the middle of the movies they would change the reels. They had these big giant projectors they had to go to the middle and they had to take the reel off. It took seven minutes approximately to take one reel off and put one reel on. Martin would do the oleo; he would get up on stage with costume, his street car costume with his gold nuggets and his hat and he'd say, "My name is Martin Itjen I come from far away. I'm just here in Oregon for one more

single day [] the things I say in silly little rhymes because when I talk to you the audience you do not have the time.” That is an example of just the kind of thing he would do. He wrote bad poetry, terrible, lousy, unbelievable poetry but it was funny the way he’d do it, it would be funny and people would laugh and they’d clap. And he’d say, “I go to see Mae West. She is so very cute. I would get myself a map but I []” that way but he would do this memorized. They’d clap, he’d get paid and he’d get on the street car and he’d work his way down the coast and made it down to Hollywood, California. And went on a date with Mae West all with the Hollywood photographers all set up in advance, pictures at Grumman’s Chinese Theater, pictures at Ashler’s Hotel, pictures at them posed in front of the street car. And with all the flash bulb going on and off Mae goes, “You’re cute Martin, I think I’ll keep you in Hollywood.” And this was all pre-planned and he answers her, “You ask me to live here in Hollywood for the rest of my sweet life but I could not leave old Skagway, my home, my heart, my wife.” (ha ha) they made, it was front page news of the Hollywood papers toast of the west coast he did two weeks at the Orpheum Theater in San Francisco, he actually had Good Year Tire was a sponsor, Ford Motor was a sponsor, he had all these people. He got back to Skagway and loaded the street car back on the ship he was back in Skagway by April of 1935. He had left Skagway on like January the 8th and tourism to Skagway doubled thanks entirely to the promotions of Martin Itjen. He then produced a small booklet called Scenic Views in and Around Skagway. It was then republished as [] it was self-published. He put his own photographs in it and then he did a 78rpm bake like record, two record set of his tour. He sold them for a dollar. And you’d be able to get on the street car and take the two-hour tour and at the end of the tour if you wanted for one dollar you could buy the record set and for one dollar you could buy the book and I have about twelve of those books [] they were publishing versions of it over time. And I have several sets of the records. And you put it on and it goes, “(static) Welcome to Skagway, if you turn to page one you’ll see ...” And what he did was that he made it where the record and the book was something that you could do if you’re sitting at home. “You see this is the Golden North Hotel. The Golden North Hotel is thirty-three rooms, originally it was a tent by the Dedman Family. Turn to page [] the Soapy Smith is a very bad man, by the time I came to town he was dead but this is what I heard from people who knew him very well.” You know and he went on and on and on (makes static sound again) into the record flipped to side two, four sides, two records the history of the Skagway Street Car orally. All that I did, I first ran across one of those little books that first winter I was up here with Dean, they had one on their coffee table [] “Oh who was he?” “Oh he was the greatest tour guide in Alaska history. He started the Skagway Street Car.” And as I started going around, I’d go to the cemetery Martin’s old railings were there, hand rails, signs that he had put up. Martin was part of the underlying sub-story. There was his gold nugget, the largest gold nugget in the world, property of Skagway Street Car and I in the back of my mind thought boy wouldn’t it be cool if you could [] that tour. And so when the railroad shut down in 1982 they laid off 150 of us in a town of 700 and I was working as the Assistant Manager of the Passenger department, they call it a Passenger Representative I was able to stay employed until the end of February because we thought we were going to run past to the trains in the summer of 83. But we couldn’t get the unions to make a deal and nobody [] they would not re-open in the summer of ’83 so I came back to Skagway and worked that summer for the Days of ’98 show. I was one of the three owners of the new Gold Rush Productions Company. The ’98 Show had been a community program which had gone on for many years and it had been a part of the Eagle’s Club. When I first came to town I was a volunteer in the ’98 Show like everybody else Jack Kirmse was volunteer [] “into town in ’97 and he was

a jeweler and these were the nuggets so he put onto a watch chain for Pat Remick who was a gambler.” And he’d walk around with his big red vest and his girth and he’d let people pick up his nuggets right there. “Here feel my nuggets, right here feel my nuggets.” “Oh that’s really wonderful” and people off the Princess Patricia and the Prince George these audiences [] and it was an old time free show. [] in exchange you’d get a free beer at the back bar, you did the show. And the highlight of the show after you kind of had the oleo acts like Jack Kirmse showing off his gold nuggets Felicia Braun who did a dance as Queenie. And she did a pantomime of dancing with people, “This is how Soapy Smith would have danced. And this is how the one legged sailor just off of the ship would have danced and “ [] extremely talented woman Felicia Braun. But the highlight of the show after two or three of these oleo I played my guitar and harmonica and sang and did my song about the Yukon. So they’d even let a brand new kid into town who’d never been around be a part of the show. But the highlight was the shooting of Dan McGrew. A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute Saloon. Read by a reader and then pantomimed by locals. We had one guy who [] and then we had one guy who played Dan McGrew and then the girls his lady known as Lou so all the local kids could be a part of the show. And seniors could come in and just dress up in costume and be a part of this. And the lights were, the lights went out, a woman screamed (he screams) two guns blazed in the dark and the lights went up and of course we’d have a guy laying on the floor and everyone was laughing [] ladies loved him and pinched his poke was the lady known as Lou. And she’d hold up the gold poke because she now had it. And people would all clap and we’d take a bow and people would all leave and go back to the Princess Patricia that sailed at 11:00 at night. That show required volunteer cast and we couldn’t do after the volunteerism of the ‘70s began to die out. As the town got busier and busier, I mean there used to be only two cruise ships in a week. If two cruise ships [] but when it got to be six nights a week it was really hard to be giving that kind of time for free. And the volunteer cast including the little high school girls that did the can-can they just simply couldn’t be recruited for free anymore. So by the winter of ‘77, ‘78 the show had pretty well died out and a group of us young eagles to make the story short got pretty drunk over the course [] Skagway in the days of ‘98 was Soapy Smith. We combined a show that had been called the Soapy Smith Show that had been done by Tom Bliss who had begun back in ‘73 and then he passed it on to Jim Richards and then Jim tag partnered with Tim Eckels and we got it up to 1977 where we talked Jim into coming into the deal and the Eagle’s Hall had froze up. They owed back taxes [] all the old timers had all left and the old Eagles had paid their dues. And these old timers said you young *** if you join the Eagles, we’ll make you Eagles and you start up the club again, save the building, thaw out the pipes maybe you can even get the show will go on again. So we all got together and we joined the Eagles and said the oath and walked into the building and realized that there was a bar license [] full of booze there were crates of whiskey back in the back room that we had just suddenly became in charge of. We had the key to the liquor storage cabinet. And we were all young guys that were here and it was winter and it was like “Yahoo!” And we wrote this little script, we wrote the new script, we got the Eagles combined with the Soapy Smith show [] so we never missed a season with a show in the Eagles since it started back in the twenties but since then it has been a privately produced show with paid cast. Which is evolved to the point that I believe Perseverance Theater is doing the show up at the Eagles finally this year. This was Jim Richards, last year was Jim’s last year and he did his final show. Two hundred locals cheered Jim as he took his last bow as Soapy Smith [] Soapy Smith. Soapy was only alive for about thirty years. He was only a bad man for about fourteen or fifteen so Jim did a lot more time than Soapy ever

did. So the Days of '98 Show was a success. That was going on. We'd had the Eagle's Hall was saved. I'd worked for my own company in '83 because the railroad had shut down. But you know it didn't work. '83 was a bad year [] pretty low coming through the southeast Alaska. So I went to work on the Alaska Railroad with a couple guys from Skagway. I was hired by a guy to start a company called Tour Alaska and he put me on the trains. We bought four ex-Milwaukee Road full dome, vista dome cars. I bought them all over the United States and brought them to Seattle to Pacific Carne Foundry where we rebuilt these dome cars loaded them on the Alaska Hydro-Train and we took them up along the westward [] the back of the Alaska railroad scheduled passenger train. We named it the Midnight Sun Express. It was the first private railroad cars service in Alaska. The man that started it was named Tom Raider, genius, absolute brilliant, incredible business man and a real gentleman. *** Alaska grew that first year with something like 3,000 people, the second year they carried 6,000 people and the next year they carried 15,000 passengers. And ah, quite honestly [] I was their Director of Rail Operations and it was wonderful riding the railroad between Anchorage and Fairbanks and riding on the trains and working with all my friends on the Alaska Railroad who'd come from White Pass we had gone up there to keep working when this one shut down, we took to riding on the ARR. And that's when I got a phone call, Chuck West, father of Alaska tourism, Chuck [] city tour in Fairbanks and Chuck called me and asked if I'd come and work for him. He had wanted to start a new boat in Prince William Sound and wanted me to do the start up and he offered me the job as Director pretty nice salary and it looked like a good deal. I wanted to do something for myself. So while I was thinking [] Klondike Hotel a friend of mine said, "Is there anything in town, back in Skagway because I've been in Anchorage and Fairbanks working on the railroad. Is there anything that we need in Skagway that isn't being done? And he goes, something personal, something personalized I see. And I went (snap) okay I could come back to Skagway and my wife Gayla was listen as I talked about this, I said yeah we [] why don't we buy an antique automobile and you could drive it like a taxi and I went "the street car" and I went and I got hold of George Rapuzzi, he was 85 at the time, the last living member of the original Street Car Company Crew. He had been Martin Itjen's best friend and mechanic on the original street car. When Martin had passed away he and Lucy had had no children, he had willed everything to George []. George was not an extroverted individual like some people are cursed with being so he had only driven the street car once a year in the Fourth of July Parade. And I said George, I want to start up the street car again and he says, "Well, what are you going to use for cars? The old one is too fragile." And I had spent my whole life savings, I had bought a 1932 Ford Paddy Wagon from the Glendale California Police Department. Took the bars out and put in Eisenglass Dodge Brothers' Screen side Delivery truck. I had took the gratings out and had put in benches and it carried five people. And I had purchased a 1927 Dodge Brother's Landelake Convertible Limousine that had belonged to the bush family as of Anheuser Busch, as one of their private limousines in St. Louis from their own private collections. I could carry twenty people and I said that's what I want to use for my cars. And he said, "[] those Dodge Brother's they are reliable and a Ford, Mark Neichum was the Ford Dealer. You have my blessing." And the street car was alive and living. We went out and drove our first season that year and carried 2,864 people (ha ha) and my wife and myself and my brother and we actually made enough money to []. Then we bought a fleet of, started buying a fleet of 1936-37 White Motor Company National Park Sight Seeing Limousines, bright yellow, they had been used in Yellow Stone National Park and we named them after the places where we bought them. We bought the first of them which had been in Yellowstone, we called it Yellowstone and that was its name. We didn't have

numbers one, two, three, four we called them where we had bought them. The second we bought from a farmer in [] California, it had been in the Universal Studios leasing fleet so we named it Hollywood because it was in the movie Big Trouble in Little China with Kurt Russell. And the third one we got out of Great Falls, Montana it was in a back barn full of hay. The Farmer was going to convert it into a motor home and he never did but we named it Great Falls. So we had those three buses we ended up with a total of eight of them. All of them were from Yellowstone [] one we sold all eight of them in a fleet sale back to Yellowstone National Park where they all came from brand new originally. To this day the Skagway Street Car Company eight national park buses are running in Yellowstone National Park. Completely restored by the Department of Energy grant with propane engines restored to their original beauty [] which they carried all their working lives here in the north. And as long as the American flag shall fly those old Skagway Street Cars will be taking people around Yellowstone National Park. I used the money from the sale to build in an incredible restoration project, six 1927 Mack model AB buses [] six of them. They were done by Boyd Coddington in Anaheim, California. Boyd did the show on Discovery Channel for a number of years called American Hotrod and Boyd in fact has the only known automobile to have ever appeared on the cover of the Smithsonian Magazine. The article was called the Automobile as Sculpture, Boyd Coddington restorations. It was about taking something and restoring it to something that it had never been [] hotrod buses by Boyd Coddington and they run every day in Skagway now. Our Street Car Company is alive and well giving tours just like Martin would have given back in the twenties and thirties. And all of our drivers are Skagway housewives or Skagway girls that some went to Skagway high school here. Some are young girls that are working their way through college come up for the summer. This year I don't have any men [] we look at the street car as kind of being a station on the road of life. You kind of stop off on the Street Car Trail and drive tours for a while and it's a way to supplement your income if your husband works for the railroad like Shauna's husband is a brakeman. And if you are working your way through college it is a great way to make money for school. So you can get money to go to Thailand for the winter but one way or the other[] I always consider it a great honor to work with these people over the years. We've had over a hundred people drive the Skagway Street Car over the twenty-five years since we started the Street Car again, restarted it. Okay I've just really been babbling, my apologies.

Stacey Baldridge: []

Steve Hites: The names of the people who aren't around anymore.

Stacey Baldridge: What about the Southeast Alaska boating job with Chuck West?

Steve Hites: So I called Chuck and said thanks but no thanks, I'm going to start my own company that was December of '85. And we took our life savings and bought those little cars. When I came up here I had [] I had fifty bucks when I started the street car.

Stacey Baldridge: Now what about the show you do here in this Theater?

Steve Hites: Um, this show is um, this show is [] where he had a little gold panning set up where he let people fan for gold at the bottom of a waterfall. You know he salted the claim and he'd do that and then he'd stop at this Creek, this little creek *** Creek, and then he'd stop at this shed that two brothers

had. Nobody knows what those guys' names were and I happened to have found the receipt [] the fish was the sign (ha ha) and you could get off the street car and walk in and feed the fish hamburger right. (ha ha) Oh yeah Martha that was really interesting. And these are really big, big fish and then they get on the street car and they drive *** and they get back to Soapy Smith's Museum []. And the lights and little electronics and the eyes would light up of this manikin at the bar and he would lift a pistol like this so it's like you just open the door and this guy turns around, his eyes light up and he puts the pistol on you, it's a mannequin and then you'd walk through and read all the newspapers on the wall. It was a self guided kind of a thing. But [] remember Martin gave it all to George Rapuzzi. The Rapuzzi Collection is now in the hands of the Park Service. Again as long as the flag shall fly this collection will be able to interpret the stories of early Skagway to Alaskans and to American citizens, forever. [] Because what I wanted to do, you were telling everyone the oral history about this is Mulvihill's house. Mulvihill was the chief dispatcher on the railroad and here is the Dedman family and I realized you know they come and the get off the ship and they're with us for an hour and a half going through these places how can I put this in [] small membership card that says that they're all honorary members of the Arctic Brother and Sisterhood. I've been doing that initiation ceremony for twenty-five years. There are a half a million people who are members of the Arctic Brotherhood all around the world. And the thing that is funny is that it is like Latin it is a dead entity. There is no such thing as the Arctic Brotherhood but there really [] Twelve and a half minute film called the Skagway story. The first six minutes are the history of Skagway from prehistory before the gold rush through to the present and then the final half are five Skagway pioneer families [] Here's picture of old Mr. Mulvihill came off the old Pacific Railroad. He was a telegrapher, chief dispatcher, his son Mickey was a conductor, his grandson Carl Mulvihill also worked for the railroad and today works in customs. Carl [] the original Golden North Hotel. Here's a picture of Emily with their granddaughter, their great granddaughter and their dog in front of the garden. It makes it real. My whole point of this entire idea is that when the lights go back up you've had a, if I can reach out and find one person in the hundred [] it is because this place is the farthest northwest ice-free deep water port on the northwest of this continent. You can bring a deep freighter right here and right now you are fifteen miles from the naval border. You can bring that vessel in here and you are fifteen miles, lead, zinc, tungsten, copper, gold, gas, oil, timber [] we are a Canadian port on American soil and that's why we're here. And that's why we'll always be the gateway to the Yukon as long as we remember that. So it falls to those people to try to remember why we're here so we don't just get lost in the PT Barnum and Bailey Circus [] are they going to send it through the port of *** British Columbia? Or are they going to use Skagway, Alaska? If Skagway gets used its jobs it's an opportunity for our kids for our families. We've got seventy-five kids in the school right now. When I first came up here there were a hundred and seventy-five kids in the school. We had 150 year round jobs on this railroad [] we get the mining contract to come through here if we can get the right price, if we're competitive if we offer the right incentives and that mine is the Skagway, maybe even gets to use the railroad? There would be another hundred new jobs here year round and there would be another hundred fifty kids in the school. [] we would be a vital, growing, vibrant place that would continue to write history into the future. So that is what I think is the next big challenge to see if we can do that. Tune in for the next []

Stacey Baldrige: []

Steve Hites: Oh they bring, they bring, they bring their guests in here to see the show. See I don't have any fear whatsoever because what I say is true. I celebrate this. I celebrate the story that is shown up on the screen. I've had to rewrite it three times as people have passed on or died or as things [] making a fundamental change in my tour system next year. Or I may not do the show next year. We'll see. This may be the last year that the Skagway story is shown on the screen. I don't know. We'll find out. But I know when Carl Mulvihill comes in here with his guests that are visiting for the week, and all locals can come and see [] because she didn't want locals to hear what she said about them so Soapy Smith I'm not talking out of school everybody knows this. She would be chopping off a chicken head and there would be blood on her apron and she'd say, "This is the blood of Soapy Smith", you know and guests were like oh my. And "I held Soapy in my hands as he bled". Oh Harriet I should have been a better [] because over the years Harriet changed a whole lot of the story. It kind of fit her own version of things. I like to have people come in to see this that have been here since the Gold Rush. It is a challenge to myself to be accurate and to be correct and to be fair and to carry on what I [] Perseverance Theater. I am doing an oral history carried on, on the families that have lived in this town, the railroaders who have worked on this grade, by the tour guides who have toured here over the years and consider that to be a worthy profession, the storytellers [] and ah, if we don't have the stories if they're not carried on then we lose something as a people. I think that there is a huge need for that in the country today because there is such a wasteland [] I know the importance of it. At least so far until I start losing it and start saying "what's my name?" then I probably won't care. Just like Barbara Kalen, you know. It's been a good thing. She likes talking about people and about stories but Barbara doesn't remember your name now, so Lord...

Stacey Baldrige: [] changed in time?

Steve Hites: Oh of course, tourism an afterthought it was what the wives of the railroaders did, open a gift shop you know, Martin Itjen was considered to be a second class citizen because he gave sightseeing tours. I remember when I first came up in '73, my first summer in '73 my tourist summer [] they were school buses that had come in from Haines. They said on them Haines School Buses right on the side and they were rented by Gray Line to drive people around the dusty streets of Skagway out to the gold rush *** I mean there was no road. The road ended just up past Black Lake. There was a waterfall that came right down the mountain and the road ended [] then the road of course went out to Dyea but they had put in I think in '51, Senator Greening had actually put that money through I think originally.

Stacey Baldrige: When did cruise ships really start coming into Skagway?

Steve Hites: Cruise ships have been coming really into Skagway [] unloading thousands of men and women on the docks. When I first came up here in '72 the first cruise ship I went down to see because it was the first cruise ship in the spring and the last in the fall was the Canadian Pacific Steam ship Princess Patricia. She was a twin funnel 1947 bill on the river Clyde. She was a beautiful, beautiful white Canadian [] was polished and old wood decks and the Prince George, her nemesis, was Canadian National Steam ship Company and it could carry 250 people and she was out at the ... you see they were fighting each other for the trade you know. Canadian National, the CNR, had actually been up here during the gold rush as well. The Grand Trunk had been the [] I mean they they'd carry freight primarily a CPR boat

would unload freight and in the summer on board would be the well healed passenger who had money and who would have their Kodak and they'd get off and they'd get on the excursion train and they'd went up over White Pass and over to Carcross and they'd get on the stern wheeler steam ship [] Benmikecree is *** it means girl of my heart and she had this beautiful garden and she played the concertina and they had rhubarb wine for all the passengers and they sang songs and they'd get back on the steam ships where they had rooms. The steam ship had over night accommodations and they'd go back to Carcross the next morning and get back on the train and come back down to Skagway [] they'd sail. They did that through the teens and the twenties and thirties right up till the war every summer. The White Pass and Yukon brought tourist and Martin Itjen would be right down there waiting with his Skagway Street Car. And he would get in to give them a tour around town and then they'd sail away. We have had tourist in town since the Gold Rush. The only [] came the Alcan Highway. The creation of the Alaska Highway became an alternative route to supply the north other than the White Pass and Yukon, the Alaska Railroad and their steamship arms, their riverboats, because both of those railroads had their own riverboats. And [] control and they opened up the highway and people could drive up the highway and with five extra tires and five extra gas cans on top and you didn't need a boat to just come up the coast and that was the biggest venture drive. And so the monopoly first break appeared with the Alaska Highway. And then the second [] and they started blasting north and the Canadians started blasting across from Carcross and in September they punched the road through. It was not official and they put a big sign that said, "You must check with Customs! Don't go over the road unless you check with Customs" [] it was the biggest party that I have ever been a part of. We got a highway, we got out of town, man we drove to the Yukon Territory. It was a great party. I mean it was like building a railroad or an airplane that flew passengers. We got out of town man and we went out and drank at the old Whitehorse Inn [] that way it wouldn't compete with the railroad. But of course that couldn't stay that way. And so when the railroad did shut down in 1982, the Anvil Mine shut down in June of '82 and the railway lost 85% of its business just like (snap)and we ran on through that summer to [] for good. The last trains and it ran dropped the fire, shut down shops and they laid off 150 people in Skagway and 400 people in area wide, in the Yukon, British Columbia and Skagway. And that was the end of the White Pass and Yukon Corporation. [] and first two winters Skagway was a cul-de-sac you couldn't even get out of here but with snowmachine. I mean this place was blocked off from the outside world except from the south with the ferry or air taxi. Sheffield got with Bill Feero and he was mayor of Skagway. And Bill said we've got to do something [] 400 people and ah, Bill Feero brought it to the City Council and he said I want to open that road. And there was a there was a City Council six and the mayor was seven and there was a three to three split [] up to the Yukon and up to Lake Bennett. He was an entrepreneur about this pass. And he sat back in his chair and the tensions were like this... there were three White Pass and Yukon employees on the council that wanted to keep that road closed. And there were three [] and I wanted to do something like this all my life and my Great Granddaddy's watching me. He says I vote YES we open the Gateway to the Yukon and he hit the gavel down on the thing and the town got a year round road. And that highway [] and it allowed long shore jobs and it allowed maintenance jobs and people that had a café would have truck drivers in there and people would go to a gas station and they'd get a tire changed and it kept the town alive. And you could drive to Whitehorse and go to the movie, go up to the airport and fly out and get [] over that highway going on the scenic drive and the

summit tour. I carry hundreds of thousands of people on that same road thanks to Bill Feero who opened the gateway to the Yukon and that is neat part of the story.

Disk Two

Stacey Baldridge: So we're going to talk about the false front in Dyea and how you got involved with that.

Steve Hites: Well Nova Warner had taken me out there the very first summer in '73 and every, you see I made enough money every summer that I could go back outside in the fall and I put myself through four years of college. Every year when the railroad would lay me off and I would [] theater degree and all of this by every year being a railroad brakeman. Every year the first thing I would do was to drive out to Dyea and I'd go look at that false front because to me that was the epitome of the most melancholy most dramatic it is like you bushwhacked out. You had to go down that long line of trees that got planted along the edges of the old property and you hang a right and there was the false front. And a tree had grown up on one side of it and a tree had grown up on the other side of it. And they were holding it in place, literally as the building collapsed, the back of the building [] fate of nature that that thing was even there because everything else in Dyea was just crumbling into the moss. Because you know it gets wet, there's wet snow and pretty soon it rots it doesn't take very long. Once something is down on the ground down it goes but for whatever reason the bottom edge of that building had been able to stand [] and held it right in place right there. And every summer I went out to see that. The summer of '76 April or it would be May, middle of May I went out, I was in town, hired out by the railroad and I had brought some ... because that was the year I graduated from Ft. Worth College. I drove up the highway with a bunch of guys that wanted to work in Alaska [] I came to see it and say bye-bye and it was flat on the ground. A heavy snow had obviously pushed it against the ground flat on the ground and it wouldn't last one year, one winter, one bad winter it would just be gone. The thing would be soggy and rotten and just rot out. So I said we got to lift this sucker back up here. So we got a bunch of people [] up and then put a 2x4 back behind it and then dropped it against the 2 x 4 just nailed it into the two trees on either side. And that's what we did, about ten of us. We lifted that thing back up again and propped it up until we could get the 2x4 back up good and then dropped it back against it where it just leaned still protected [] was in town. They had shown up they had an architect and archaeologist and they even had Dyea Rangers they were going up and down the Chilkoot Trail. And after we had done that, I don't know who it was but somebody said, "well you know you shouldn't have done that. That's the park." And you know [] they know where I am. They can come and get me. But nobody ever did. And I could take people out every spring to see the false front. And one year I went out in the summer and they had cut the trees down and they were, they had a [] held up by some wood (ha) and it wasn't the same. But that was when they were doing that, you'll have to check with Karl Gurcke because I think it was probably 1994 or 95 and I guarantee you it would have been gone []. That if you have the opportunity you need to do something. In the window across the street of Park Service blue enamel stove that is in the display window. It says found along the White Pass Trail, portable tent stove. I found that I found that up at White Pass city [] and on the south end of the bracket bridge there in a mitten, there on the top I pulled out this beautiful little blue stove. It had a door on it and I stuck it in the back pack and I took it into the town and I went into the National [] and I guarantee it if I didn't do what I just

did it would have been gone. Ninety-nine percent of the items from the Chilkoot trail are gone from when I first walked the trail. They were all taken and walked off before the Park started watching the trail. When I was a railroad brakeman we used to watch people sawing the [] on the mantel and they were just walking off the trail.

Notations:

[] indicates gap in replay

*** indicates the recording was garbled