

Summary for H75-10

C. J. Woofter, Al Cosleth, Arthur V. Buell, and Joe Ulmer with unidentified interviewers in Fairbanks, AK 1947

SIDE 1

C. J. Woofter is interviewed by an unidentified interviewer on January 15, 1947, in Fairbanks, AK. He arrived in Fairbanks on July 4, 1905. A former schoolmate who'd been to AK told him about it, and Woofter decided to take advantage of the easy money to be had here, to save enough to finish his education at Cornell University. His original home was Parkersford, WV.

Woofter's route was from Seattle to St. Michael by steamship, then up the Yukon on a large boat. He changed to a smaller boat at the Tanana River (Ft. Gibbon) to finish the last leg of the trip to Fairbanks. Woofter arrived as a member of the U.S. Signal Corps.

Woofter tells that there were five radio transmitters set up in AK in 1906, at Eagle, Circle, Fairbanks, Ft. Gibbon, and Home. They were built to bridge line breaks in the Washington/Alaska Military Telegraphic Cable System. This system was originally to go to Russia, but the tremendous engineering difficulties and costs prevented that from taking place.

The first two transmitters in the territory of Alaska were in St. Michael and Safety Harbor, and were built to bridge Norton Bay. These two were the first two successfully commercially operated wireless signal stations in the world, says Woofter. Spark-gap equipment was used until 1913 or 1914, when the first tube was used.

Woofter remembers the condenser in use around 1907. It was comprised of a wall of 298 Lyddon glass jars (each 18x2 in.), covered inside and outside with tinfoil. Condensers, he comments, are much smaller now. The transmitter room they used was completely soundproof, with a 4-inch wall of mineral wool. Ozone fumes from the spark-gap operation became dizzying in this sealed room; they cut a hole in the floor and put the spark-gap underneath, and this way rid themselves of the offensive odor.

In 1911, Woofter recalls, a privateer of the Signal Corps, James B. Winchester (aka Foxy), made an important discovery regarding the audion tube. In that year each wireless station was sent audion detectors to replace the former technology of crystal detectors, with strict orders from Washington, DC, to not tamper with the new devices. Foxy, who, as an aside, had spent 15 years as a taps drummer for the Ringling Bros. Circus, decided to take one apart. He found he could send signals as well as receive them with the detector tube. His supervisor transmitted this information to the organization in Washington, DC. The next year the Signal Corps started using transmitter tubes.

Woofter a couple stories about helping people through his radio work. Sam Doogan, a merchant, had a trading post at Atlatna and Wiseman. While filling a kerosene lamp one day, he was severely burned on his face and hands. Woofter happened to be tuning that day from Barrow to Livengood, and he crossed Wiseman's frequency, which was sending out an S.O.S. signal. In 27 minutes, Woofter had a plane in the air. The next morning Duggan was brought in for treatment.

Harold Gillam had a contract with the Weather Bureau to fly at 20,000 ft., and for this purpose he had built a weather phone in his plane. The U.S. Signal Corps had the

only other radiotelephone in Fairbanks; when conditions didn't permit Gillam to see the ground for a landing, the Signal Corps had to talk him down.

Woofter served 28 years with the Signals Corps in AK. During WWII he was Operator in Charge in Fairbanks, with a detail of 15 men. He was a commissioned officer from June 1, 1942 to December 1945, when he became too old for that status. He re-enlisted as a master sergeant to finish his 30 years.

In Fairbanks, Woofter is connected with the American Legion as their representative to the Chamber of Commerce and a member of the executive committee. He belongs to all the lodges in town, and is a former member of the AK legislature, 9th session, 1929. He expects communication service to improve as soon as the technology arrives, and thinks ACS is more than capable of handling these improvements.

Al Cosleth is interviewed on August 23, 1947 by an unidentified interviewer in Fairbanks, AK. He is 76 at this time and a member of the Pioneers of AK. He was born in Colorado, and was 27 years old in 1897, when he left Wyoming to board the Topeka steamer in Seattle, bound for AK. He spent 1897 and 1898 in Skagway, where he had a brother. Cosleth ran a restaurant here, where the average price of a meal was 50 cents (this was thought high by some). Cosleth also sold horses he had shipped from Wyoming. Later he bought 5 teams from Seattle, sold 3 of them, and kept the other 2 to come over the Dalton Trail to Five Finger Rapids.

There was a sawmill at Five Finger Rapids, and one of Cosleth's party was a sawyer. They made a contract and pocketed \$10,000 in less than 2 months, according to Cosleth. The demand for lumber was very high at that time since cattle were being shipped to Dawson.

Cosleth and his comrades then built a raft and floated to Ft. Selkirk, where they sold lumber to the Canadian government, which had a post here. Cosleth then bought sheep and loaded them on the steamer Terrell. This steamer subsequently was stuck on a sandbar for 20 days. Cosleth decided to sell the sheep to the steamship company and took a scow, with one horse as his companion, to Dawson on October 18th. He prospected on Bear Creek that winter and didn't find much. He worked a series of jobs, in the meat market and restaurants, and later ran a roadhouse on Bonanza Creek, which he sold to Billy O'Leary.

In the spring of 1903, Cosleth came to Fairbanks, with two horses, following Jujiro Wada's announcement of the gold strike there. Fairbanks at that time was tents and stumps, Cosleth recalls. He remembers being on Cleary when all the timber in that area burned. The population was divided between the sites of Chena and Fairbanks. He pitched his tent where the Nordale Hotel now stands. Some of the first buildings in town were Barnette's trading post, where the N.C. Company is now located, Petry's The Pioneer, and the Senate Saloon. Cosleth passed a sawmill on his trip to Fairbanks, which came up the Fortymile and down the Goodpaster River. Carolyn and Fred Parker ran this sawmill, and Pete Malone had a store there also.

Cosleth talks about an employee of Carolyn Parker who supported both she and her husband, who didn't like to work, on \$100 a month. There were not any structured social service organizations such as we now have; Cosleth tells that when people were sick or in need, there would be a collection started for them. For example, a man was killed in a mine in Ester. As soon as it was discovered that he had a wife and a new baby

that he'd never seen elsewhere, Carolyn Parker promised to fill the child's stocking with gold to send for support.

Cosleth describes the flu epidemic just before WWI. Everyone in Livengood was ill. Cosleth had organized the Chamber of Commerce there, and had been elected president of it. He went to Bill Mann's store and declare, "We need a doctor here." Cosleth decided he'd ask Dr. Sutherland. In less than an hour, he received a wire from the doctor that said, "On my way. Meet me at log jam with dog team."

Jack Irwin took his team and went to meet the doctor. The doctor systematically treated everyone in Livengood who was ailing, then proceeded (accompanied by Frank Bauers) to treat the natives with the flu. Only two people died during this epidemic.

Cosleth was planning to leave AK for the Outside a few days after the interview took place.

SIDE 2

Arthur V. Buell is interviewed on August 15, 1947 by an unidentified interviewer in Fairbanks, AK. Buell is a visitor to the state at the time of the interview, but came to AK for the first time in August 1897. He states that he's a cartoonist down in the lower 48. This is how he came to such an occupation: In 1903/1904 he was driving a milk truck in Tacoma, WA. When he cut the tip of his finger off in a hunting accident and could no longer carry a milk jug, he became a cartoonist for the Tacoma Union, earning \$4 per week.

Buell arrived on the Willamette, a coal boat carrying 1,250 people, horses, and dogs. During the trip he and others patrolled the decks making sure that men didn't smoke in the hay. They landed between Dyea and Skagway. Buell worked for Skovell of New York World at that time. Then he got a job taking topography for the Brackett wagon road, which was later sold to the White Pass Yukon Railroad.

He came to the Interior in the spring of 1898. He was sick when he arrived in Dawson. There he got a job as a cartoonist with Bjorn Swinehardt of the Midnight Sun, the first paper in Dawson according to Buell. He says Swinehardt beat Gene Allen to this claim by 15 minutes. Buell made the first pictures of Alec MacDonald's holding: 2,150 ounces of gold nuggets.

Buell had some rowdy times as a cartoonist. One was when he fought the old heavyweight Frank Slavin in the Klondike Nugget office. Buell had depicted Slavin as a "paid booster" (Slavin had formerly been strongly against the government, but he changed his opinions when he became a superintendent of a stamp mill and his wife a schoolteacher at Bear Creek). Buell says he hit Slavin in the eye, but the Northwest Mounted Police intervened before any more damage was done. The next day Buell draw Slavin into the corner of his cartoon, showing him tied up with manila rope. They became the best of friends after that, up until Slavin's death.

Some of Buell's most famous cartoons included one with a miner standing over the grave of a British official. Flatfoot Thompson was Buell's boss at this time, and he said Buell would be up for sedition if anyone was murdered in town. They ran it anyway. Buell refers to another "tough" cartoon, but declares that the less said about it, the better.

When asked whether he'd met any of the famous northerners around in those days, Buell replies that he met Jack London and Kid Williams, a prizefighter, in the Tom Chisholm (Bucket of Blood) Saloon in Dawson. He ran into London again at the Johnson/Jeffries fight in Reno in 1910.

Robert Service was very popular, but Buell never met him in Dawson. He did meet him more recently at a convention in Seattle, where Service was the speaker preceding Buell. Buell also notes that he was acquainted Rex Beach, author of *The Spoilers*, but not while in Nome. He met him at 1907 fight in Tonopah, Nevada.

Buell left Dawson for Nome on December 28, 1904. Here he worked with David Tuxbury on the *Arctic Sun*, for George Swinehardt. Buell mentions that at one point Tuxbury wrote a story and Buell drew a cartoon of Wyatt Earp to go along with it.

Joe Ulmer is interviewed by an unidentified interviewer on June 5, 1947 in Fairbanks, AK. Ulmer makes him home in the Tanana/Yukon Valley; he receives his mail in Central. He states that he works in engineering and mining, as well as serving as undertaker, preacher, and doctor in Central.

When Ulmer was in school in Germany (south of Stuttgart), he had read about Humboldt and Kotzebue's explorations of the Arctic. He was just over 19 when he moved to the U.S., with the intention of getting up to AK. In the spring of 1897 in San Francisco he met Professor Mecklen of the Smithsonian Institute, a geologist who was making exploration of the Arctic, and signed on to the boat.

The boat left San Francisco on March 9th, just before the fight between Jim Culver and Dick Simmons. They landed at Dutch Harbor on April 4th, overhauled the boat, and buried a man who had died on the trip. The boat was destined for Point Barrow, where the headquarters for the project were located. They encountered ice floes and had to wait for ice to move to get through the strait to Point Hope. At Herschel Island they dropped off some cargo. Point Barrow and the Arctic coast were exclusively Eskimo at that time, says Ulmer, except for Charlie Brower, Tom Gordon, Fred Hobson, and Jim Allen (engineer on the *Jenny*).

Up at Barrow, they put on shows and sang for workers and natives. Ulmer played female characters a few times. He borrowed Mrs. Marsh, the missionary's wife's clothes for this one time. Mrs. Brower was in the audience and couldn't account for this new White woman (she didn't recognize Ulmer).

While of the voyage to Barrow, the boat also landed at Anadyr, Russia, where California Telegraph Cable used to have a site. They only met Eskimos (Chukchi) while there, no "Russian," Ulmer comments. They picked up some nice quartz specimens here.

Ulmer talks about several long trips he's taken in the north country. He traveled from Barrow to Umiat. In 1900, he went 60 miles from Nome to Shishmaref in a rowboat. He trekked up the Stikine on snowshoes in 1912, a 400-mile trip. In addition, he traveled 1,400 miles to Kobuk, snow shoeing 900 miles of the way.

What the land needs now is new blood, Ulmer thinks, because the old-timers are getting too old. Gold is the primary mineral resource, he says, and he doesn't believe it's tapped out by any means. There's also nickel and tin to be mined. He comments that the fishing resources are undeveloped here, and that there's farming going on in the Copper River Valley. He states that population rises depend on resource development and management.

Ulmer wouldn't trade his time in AK "for a million dollars." He wraps up the interview by communicating his feeling that in AK it's not the money that matters but the self-satisfaction people get out of their lives.