

Summary for H75-12

Harry Badger, John J. Buckley, Dr. J. A. Sutherland, and Myrtle Feiner with Al Bramstedt and unidentified interviewers in Fairbanks, AK 1946-47

SIDE 1

Harry Badger, aka the Strawberry King of the Tanana Valley, is interviewed by an Al Bramstedt in Fairbanks, AK on March 14, 1947. He came to AK in 1900. He was born and raised on a farm about 30 miles from St. Paul, MN, where he stayed until he was 19. He then traveled west, where his fathers and brothers had gone when he was a baby. He stayed in CA for 1 ½ years; he didn't like it there so he went to Burlington, Washington, where he bought a piece of cut-over land 4 miles from Mt. Vernon. He tried to raise fruit trees here for 10 years, with Walter Crick, his current partner. In 1897 the stampede to Dawson started, and in 1898 people from that area who'd followed the rush started to come back. Some men who'd been poor all their lives came back with thousands of dollars. In the latter part of 1899, Badger saw these men arriving at the depot, and he told Crick what he'd seen (they lived together), and Crick said, "Let's go." Badger told Crick to sell his horse and he'd go see if he could borrow enough money on their place to get outfitted.

They went down to Seattle the latter part of the holidays of 1899 and boarded an old cattle boat called the Humboldt. In Queen Charlotte Sound the water started going into the hold where the cattle were. The "old Swede" who was at the helm turned back toward the islands, to batten down the hatches. One man started crying and said, "Boys get your clothes on; we're going to drown." Badger told him to shut up--if they were going to drown anyway, what was the use of putting on clothes?

The Humboldt landed at Skagway. From there Badger and Crick pulled their gear on sleds through the snow and cold, to Tagish, where they stopped in at the police station. Addressing the two men whose beards were frozen stiff, the policeman inside asked what they were doing out in cold like that? They replied that they were all right; how cold was it? Badger says they nearly froze before getting their tent up when they heard it was -65. It took 40 days to pull the sleds from Skagway to Dawson. When they arrived they worked for wages until they had enough money to buy a claim. Their property was on "Poverty Bar," and was the only 100-ft. claim that didn't have any gold on it, according to Badger.

Badger tells how a "little Jap" called Wada appeared in December 1902 with news about a discovery of "9 feet of 25-cent dirt," which meant exceptionally rich soil. Grant Murdock and Badger packed up and dogsledded down from Dawson to Fairbanks (it took them 33 days). They had intended to go to Circle, but were instead steered up the Fortymile, down the Goodpaster, down the Tanana, and down the slough to Fairbanks. Food was scarce in town at that time, but E. T. Barnette had a few staples, mainly flour. He offered to sell the flour at \$5 a sack, provided customers bought a \$75 outfit as well, which included 3 cases of canned vegetables that weren't fit to eat. The men called a miners' meeting, the only law of the land. They decided Barnette had better "turn that flour loose or we'd take it." Next morning there were notices up that said sacks of flour for \$5, and everyone lined up to get one. Badger comments that everybody abided by the law of the miner.

The miners who showed up after Wada's announcement were worried that it was a false alarm, because none of the claims had yet been truly developed. Pedro let men look at his holes and scrape a pan of dirt; so did McCarty at his claim on Goldstream, but there was no definite pay there. Grant Murdock went back to Dawson, and hundreds of others left as soon as they found this out. Badger said there were a lot of unprospected hills and it looked like a good place to stay to him.

During the summer there was an authentic strike on Fairbanks Creek, right above Discovery Creek. Miners went out to get a look and the owners of the claim told them to clear off. Badger and Bob McChesney sat on a hill above the claim and ate lunch. There they stayed until the owners went to bed. They then descended and picked up a handkerchief of dirt, panned it in a greasy frying pan, and got 2 ½ out of it; they decided it was pay dirt. Then the same thing happened on Cleary Creek. A report came that they'd struck it on Discovery Claim at the mouth of Wolf Creek. Badger asked Lon Doggit what it was like and he said they had to clean the long-Tom every 2 ½ hours. So Badger went to town and opened a real estate office. He says he spent most of his time in this business grubstaking people.

Badger states that there weren't many shootouts back in those days, but he tells of one that did take place. The rule was that when you staked a lot you had to record it with the town recorder and put a cabin on it within 30 days. If you ran out of food and had to go to Circle, you got 30 days leave of absence from the town recorder. Alec Kootz built a cabin, minus the roof and windows, then got a leave of absence and went to Circle for supplies. While Kootz was gone, Billy Dunkle, the town recorder, sold the lot to someone else. When Kootz got back, his cabin was finished and someone was living in it. He gave Dunkle an old-fashioned thrashing. Later, Kootz got drunk and decided he was going to beat Dunkle's head off with a pick handle. Dunkle ran into George Noble's Saloon on Front St. Noble hid Dunkle in his bedroom, taking Noble's 6-gun with him. When Kootz came in Noble said Dunkle wasn't there. Kootz said that he was and leaped over the bar and kicked in the door to the bedroom. Dunkle shot him through the chest, not fatally. Badger was the chairman of the following miners' meeting: they concluded that the first beating was warranted, but that Dunkle had a right to protect his life, so Kootz got what he had coming in being shot.

In 50 years Tanana Valley will be covered with farms (raising both cattle and food) just as thick as in MN, Badger predicts. Badger was in one session of the legislature in Juneau, in 1945. At the time of the interview he is farming out at what is known as Badger Road.

John J. (Jack) Buckley is interviewed by an unidentified male interviewer in Fairbanks, AK on December 11, 1946. At the time of interview, he has been in Fairbanks 42 years, and in the North Country for 51 years on November 29th. He was born in Honolulu? But raised in the state of Washington.

He says he was primarily drawn to Alaska by gold. His father was already here, and had property on Mastodon Creek. Buckley came up to assist him in mining. He arrived in Circle City before the Dawson strike was made. He left Circle in the spring of 1897 for Dawson, and stayed there until May of 1899.

Buckley states that the law and order kept in Dawson during the stampede was exceptional "considering the number and class of people" that flooded in at that time.

The Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police were the law enforcers. They were very strict, though some things they allowed to go on if no one was being injured.

Buckley came to Fairbanks in 1904 and hasn't left since. It was a boomtown then. Miners were drifting and hoisting dirt during the winter and washing it in the spring. Mining techniques have improved a lot, says Buckley.

The law enforcement then was the same as it is now, that is, conducted under the U.S. Marshal. At that time headquarters for the 3rd Division were at Eagle. The deputy for Fairbanks was Ed Wickersham, brother of James Wickersham, former delegate to Congress. Ed Wickersham had been transferred from Circle to Fairbanks.

Buckley was with the fire department from November 1905 until September 1918. He recounts what happened during the fire of 1906. The 22nd of May was a warm day. The fire started at 4:15 pm at the Fairbanks Building, which housed stores, offices, and the Eagles' Lodge room. On the second floor was a dentist, who was using a blowtorch, which caught the curtain on fire. This was at 1st Ave. and Cushman, where the Nordale Hotel is now. The entire block was consumed, including the Pinsky store and the courthouse (where the Federal Building is now). By 6 pm there were no buildings standing in that district. People went out into the country and set up tents while they were rebuilding their homes, which had begun already 24 hours after the blaze.

The fire dept.'s equipment at this time consisted of a baggage wagon (a 4-wheel wagon to be pulled by a horse). The dept. did not own a horse, so men had to pull the wagon to fires. As they got out to the street bystanders would yell, "Mush!" in play. Buckley states that the entire town was made of wood, part of what made fire so dangerous here. He relates how a cupola fell off the Fairbanks Bldg. and broke the hose connection with the main hydrant below. By the time the firefighters had attached the hose to the N.C. powerhouse, they'd lost everything.

There were two other disastrous fires on that lot. One was in 1918, in which the 2-story building that housed the Tanana Club on the second floor caught fire, and the two buildings east of it were burned too. Firemen, however, prevented the flames from spreading further than this.

Buckley considers himself an advocate of progress. He describes the country as desolate and lonely back in the old days, and supplies were difficult to get in to the territory. In the summer, merchants had to get supplied to the dock in Fairbanks by September 25th, and made those goods last until the following July. Many supplies ran out during the winter. After the mail contract from Valdez to Fairbanks, a trail was constructed. Some businesses freighted fruits and vegetables over the trail during the winter, which was expensive, but not as expensive as it is now to fly them in, says Buckley.

Buckley is glad the Outside has acknowledged AK, and hopes they will remove some restrictions and allow progress to continue.

SIDE 2

Dr. J. A. Sutherland is interviewer by Al Bramstedt in Fairbanks, AK in the 1940s. According to Bramstedt, it's the first interview of the Here's a Pioneer series. He's considered the "dean" of doctors in AK because he's the oldest and the longest practicing doctor here (49 years). In the winter of 1897-98 he came to the Yukon via

Skagway and White Pass. He spent 6 years in Dawson, before arriving in Fairbanks on October 8th, 1904.

In Dawson, about 140 doctors were registered at the Klondike Hotel. Only 16 of those were qualified to practice in the Northwest Territories. A medical board was formed and they allowed those with 3 years of training to come up for examination. One man who claimed he was a doctor died of typhoid fever. The insurance company then revealed that they did not have a doctor under that name, but that they did have a barber of that name.

The first epidemic Sutherland recalls in Dawson was cerebral spinal meningitis, which was extremely fatal. Some men thought this came from hauling sleds with rope pressing on the back of their necks. In the summer of 1898 there was an epidemic of typhoid. There was no sanitation system in the town, so the epidemic was not a surprise to the doctor. The main treatment for typhoid at that time was "starvation," though Sutherland found that the patients that he allowed a little food seemed to do better than others.

The only potatoes, as well as many other vegetables, they had at that time were "desiccated" (powdered). The vitamins these lacked were a main cause of the scurvy endemic in the winter of 1898-99. The treatment for this, of course, was consumption of fresh food. Many did not recover.

Fairbanks was a tent and cabin town in 1904 when Sutherland arrived. Front St. between Lacey and Cushman was a mass of saloons, dance halls, cigar stores, and gambling joints, with a few restaurants here and there. He gives a figure of 8,000 people residing there in the winter of 1904. There were about 18 doctors. Sutherland couldn't find an office, so he went to Cleary Creek and built a hospital there. After 2 years he sold it to Dr. Danford.

In those days they treated pneumonia with poultices. It was symptomatic treatment. There were no sulfa drugs or penicillin, or oxygen. All calls were made with a dog team or horse and cutter. Dr. Paul had a horse and cutter but Sutherland mostly used a dog team, and it was very time-consuming travel.

Sutherland tells the story of one of his most memorable medical cases. One day a "little Irishman" out on Cleary Creek came to the doctor and said, "Doctor, there's a man I want you to see." The doctor asked why. The man said, "I think I nearly killed him." Sutherland asked what he'd done to him. The man replied, "I took an axe to him." The victim's skull had been split open. He was brought to Sutherland's hospital. At 5 pm Mrs. Biggle, the nurse; Mrs. Sutherland; and the doctor prepared the brain as well as possible (by candlelight), tucking the membranes in and wiring the skull on. By 10 pm the man (a native) hadn't come to and the doctor said, "I guess he was a bad Indian," whereupon the man immediately retorted with, "I'm a good Indian."

Sutherland told the Irishman, Paddy McKnight, that if the native man died, he'd be up for murder or manslaughter. McKnight asked the doctor to arrange things for him. Sutherland rang up Mr. Harlem, the D.A. in Fairbanks, and he told Sutherland to bring McKnight in. The doctor said that was the deputy marshal's job. There was no marshal though, so Sutherland told McKnight to borrow the native's cousin's 3 dogs, plus his own 3 dogs, and mush the injured man in on a mattress and to give himself up. The injured man was brought in to St. Matthew's hospital and put under Dr. Castle's care. Five days later he was out and lived several years if not longer. When they'd got to Fairbanks

McKnight had knocked on the door of the jail asking to be let in. They told him to see the marshal. There was no charge against him, but the D.A. said to put him in jail until they saw what happened with the native man. When the native man recovered, McKnight was released from jail and that was all the punishment he received for that. Three weeks later, McKnight got drunk in the Pioneer Hotel and broke whisky bottles and a mirror. For this, he was sentenced to 3 months in jail, whereas he only served a few days for a malicious attack on another man, Sutherland comments.

Dr. Sutherland witnessed the birth, death, and resurrection of Fairbanks. He liked the birth the best, wild and woolly as it was. It was a "he-man's town." The present town is soft and effeminate compared to then. Men lived hard, played hard, and drank hard. Sutherland tells how a woodchopper played Faro and lost. He got up and said, "Easy come, easy go. I go chop some more wood." People back then were friendly and helpful, but nowadays they're not as giving.

Sutherland concludes the interview by complimenting modern doctors for the job they're doing. When he thinks about all they didn't know about medicine in his early days, he wonders how they even practiced.

Myrtle Feiner is interviewed by an unidentified woman in Fairbanks, AK in the 1940s. She's in AK on a sightseeing tour, before returning to her home in Milwaukee. Feiner was just on a buying trip to New York, for new fashion for her store in Milwaukee. There have been significant changes in the styles for this fall, she says. The present average skirt length is 14 in., varying from 12-15 in., depending on stature and personality. Feiner thinks longer skirts are not just a fad. They've been accepted all over. CA is wearing them longer than anywhere else.

A full sweep in garments, especially coats, is noteworthy this season. Since the L-85 restriction has been lifted, designers are using their freedom to use more fabric again. Jumbo pockets on coats, large Puritan collars, and fur-trimmed suits are some of the trends that will be seen. After the lean war years Feiner and the interviewer are happy for the return of personality in fashion. "Jap" mink and beaver are used lavishly this year.

Suits have won a niche for themselves, according to Feiner. They're a classic; women are always well groomed in a suit. Gabardine is still a top fabric. Wine tones, deep green, and browns are strong colors this season. Of course, black is always good. Feiner states that designers dip back into history for color and design, and that dark hose are in this season.

She submits that smaller towns in AK are probably not style conscious, but she finds that Fairbanks shops carry very fine merchandise and well-known names, and that Fairbanks women are very well dressed. Feiner came up to AK with two other women from Milwaukee. She marvels at the long daylight hours, and tells that she and her friends panned for gold at Livengood, where the dust in the air was very prominent.