

## Summary for H75-14

**Blanche Cascaden, Mrs. Dennis Coyle, Lawrence Carnes, Andrew Nerland, and Dick Rothenberg with Al Bramstedt and Mr. Thomas in Fairbanks, AK 1940s**

### SIDE 1

Blanche Cascaden is interviewed by Al Bramstedt in Fairbanks, AK in the 1940s. Mrs. Cascaden moved to AK with her parents. Her father came up to mine in 1900 and brought his family up. They arrived in Dawson on a scow from Whitehorse. (They'd taken the railroad from Skagway to Whitehorse.) This was in September of 1900 and the lakes and rivers were not frozen yet. In Dawson, it appeared to Cascaden that everyone was in a hurry, and that they all seemed young, healthy, and strong, with plenty of money and ambition. The town had comfortable buildings. The cheapest meal at a restaurant was 75 cents, up into the hundreds of dollars for large parties. After 3 years in Dawson, they moved to Eagle for 2 years. The family came over the land trail to Fairbanks in 1906 by horse and double-ender sled. Cascaden was a homemaker at that time; she lived in a log cabin with one or two rooms and three or four other people. She didn't think of this as a hardship but a pleasure. She moved to Livengood in 1918, and has been going back and forth ever since. Cascaden was involved with the effort to construct a road to Livengood.

Directly following Cascaden's interview, Mrs. Dennis Coyle is interviewed by Al Bramstedt in Fairbanks, AK on the same day in the 1940s. She came to AK in July of 1900. At that time the railroad between Skagway and Whitehorse was not completed. Her family took a little boat down from Lake Bennett to Lake Lindeman, and caught the train from there to Whitehorse. They took a large boat from there to Dawson. Her father had come in over the Chilkoot Pass in 1897; he came out by way of St. Michael in 1898 and the family came in 1900.

Coyle describes Dawson in 1904 and 1905. She says there was a dance held every week, by either the Masonic Lodge or the Oddfellows. Children went with their parents. The Reverend George Pringle attended the dances also, but he always quit at midnight. They went to church the next morning. Coyle says the MPs in Yukon were very strict; the reputation for lawlessness at that time is more fiction than fact. Canned foods were available, but eggs and fresh produce were hard to get. All staples were brought up from St. Michael. In spring and late fall, eggs, bacon, and ham were taken in to the north by way of Dawson.

Coyle has since lived in Ruby for many years. In 1911 she went Outside to Washington state, and returned to AK in 1917. From then on she lived down in Ruby. There were no roads there at that time, but plenty of mosquitoes. She tells of coming out of Ruby: She walked from Poorman to Tamarack Landing (11 miles), then took a gas boat on the Novakaket River. It took about 300 miles on this river to make 60 miles overland, she thinks.

Coyle has gone to the States many times. One trip took her 33 days to go from Ruby to Seattle. They were taking the cannery crew of the Carlisle Packing Co. to the mouth of the river, as well as the cold storage barge for meat during the summer. There were about 350 passengers and 11 barges hooked onto an old boat called the Seattle Swede, which she thinks is at St. Michael now.

At the mouth of the river at Kotlik they were frozen in for a week. When they finally got to St. Michael, they waited for 4 days for the Old Victoria to unload. A dog team met Victoria 1 ½ miles out, and took its passengers into Nome. Coyle says when they returned they had to unload Victoria's produce for Nome and Golovnin Bay.

When she's in the States, she's always anxious to get back to AK. She's a member of the Pioneer Women of Alaska, which has between 40 and 50 members at the time of the interview.

Lawrence Carnes is interviewed by Mr. Thomas in Fairbanks, AK in the 1940s. Carnes has been in AK at this point for 2 ½ weeks. He came into Anchorage and spent a week visiting, then waited a few days to get a plane to Fairbanks. He is tremendously impressed with the friendliness of the people, which makes up for the cold weather. He is program director of the Army and Navy Dept. of the YMCA, headquartered in New York. He has been working with them for 25 years. He says that Alaskans have been writing New York to see whether YMCAs would be a good idea for their communities. The military has also enquired. He's here to talk with people and see what kinds of communities there are; Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Ketchikan are the primary cities he's visiting. People here want all the leisure activity opportunities for their children that other places have. He plans to take the steamer from Juneau to Ketchikan. He says there is a good deal of interest and he announces a meeting to discuss the possibility of YMCAs.

Carnes has been national staff person of the USO for the past 5 years. He congratulates Fairbanks on the fabulous USO club here. He's been to clubs in 46 of the 48 states and has never seen a better one. Mr. Thomas mentions an upcoming carnival. Carnes would like to see a dog team in action before he leaves. Mr. Thomas comments that this is one of the coldest winters ever. The USO show at the Empress Theatre is plugged. Carnes repeats that all civic organizations have been invited to the meeting to listen and ask questions about the YMCA.

Andrew Nerland is interviewed by Al Bramstedt in Fairbanks, AK in the 1940s. Nerland came in the spring of 1898 to AK, from Seattle, WA. During the summer of 1898 (sic) (1897) the steamer Portland came into Seattle from St. Michael, AK, carrying about \$1 million in gold from the Klondike. That's when Nerland decided to come north.

Nerland arrived in Dyea on a steamer from Seattle. From there he pulled his outfit along the Dyea trail, on a sled with a strap around his neck to Sheep Camp (about 20 miles, Nerland says). Nerland talks about the trip over Chilkoot Pass. At Sheep Camp men had to lighten their loads, to go over The Scales—all provisions had to be carried on a man's back. There was a big snow slide in the first part of April of 1898; 62 or 63 people were killed, as Nerland remembers it. He was camped at Sheep Camp at the time. It was Sunday and snowing hard, so they decided not to go out that day. About 100 people, however, holding onto a rope, were heading for Sheep Camp when they were caught in the slide. All bodies were eventually dug out of the snow, apparently, because none were found in the spring.

Nerland went down from Chilkoot Pass to Lake Bennett. It took about 24 days of travel between Dyea and Lake Bennett. There were some women in the rest of the travelers, and very few children. He made camp at Lake Bennett in a place where he

could get lumber for the boat he had to build. There were thousands of people there, building boats and rafts of all shapes and sizes, says Nerland. As soon as the ice on Lake Bennett went out, they took their boats down to Whitehorse. At Whitehorse Rapids hundreds of boats backed up to get through. It took about 10 minutes to go through the whitewater. One boat had smashed against the rocks in the middle of the rapids and when Nerland went by the man was still clinging to the rocks in the middle of the river. Of course the other boats were moving too fast to pick him up.

In Dawson, Nerland found a very crowded town. He recalls that the trails and creeks were like city sidewalks. There were a few cases of scurvy, though fresh food started to come in with people over the trail. A can of milk cost \$1. Nerland took a 3-week walk over the creeks; he didn't do any prospecting at that time, though.

All the cheechakos were anxious to get claims. Nerland tells a story of two or three who came up Bonanza Creek and talked to one of the old miners, asking whether he knew where they could get some mining ground. The sourdough said tersely, "Yeah, on top of that hill over there," not expecting any gold to be there. The cheechakos took his word and went up the hill. They dug and dug, and eventually this became one of the richest pieces of ground in that country. Millions of dollars were mined from it, according to Nerland.

Nerland met his wife in Seattle several years before his trip up north. He took a trip back out in the fall of 1899. Their son Lesley was born in Dawson. In the spring of 1904, they moved to Fairbanks. There were steamboats coming in and the streets were crowded with people. Cleary Creek, Chatanika, and Goldstream were all lively mining centers. Cleary even had three banks in business at one time.

While in Fairbanks, Nerland has served as Councilman, Mayor, and on the Legislature. Bramstedt asks him about the future. Nerland finds AK a wonderful place to do business and live. People are wonderful and he likes that he knows so many of them; he has faith in the future.

Dick Rothenberg is interviewed by Al Bramstedt in Fairbanks, AK in the 1940s. He'll have been in AK 50 years next June. He called Seattle his home Outside. Back then, his old partner Julius Stork had friends in AK who advised him to come to the Fortymile country. That was just before the Klondike strike and Rothenberg was 26 years old. He and Stork came up on the steamer Elkai from Seattle to Dyea, as Skagway was not yet established. They arrived 10 days after the first contingent of miners went over the Chilkoot. The steamer Portland hadn't arrived and the strike in the Klondike hadn't been published yet, so they were all alone on the trail. They were not familiar with the trail, but Stork had bought a book in Seattle, called Miner Bruce's Guide, to help them find their way. (Interview continues on Side 2.)

## SIDE 2

(Continued from Side 1.)

Miner Bruce's Guide gave distances, locations of lakes, and so forth. They crossed the Chilkoot Pass, where there was wet snow and blizzard conditions, and camped at Green Lake. There they started a big campfire to dry out their clothes and shoes. Stork's left shoe and Nerland's right shoe burned up. So between them they had

one pair of shoes, and one pair of boots, which they traded daily. They got to Lake Lindeman and whipsawed lumber to build a boat.

The pass between Lindeman and the next lake was very dangerous. They caught up with two brothers who'd just lost their outfit in it. They had already lost their entire outfit once before, and had had to go back to Juneau to get another. One of the brothers was so disheartened he went back to his tent and shot himself through the head. They buried him on the shores of Lake Lindeman, wrapped in his blanket and canvas. The other brother went back to Juneau. This was in June of 1897. The steamer Portland carrying the first load of gold didn't get out until July. When it did get out, however, the second rush started.

Stork and Rothenberg crossed the lakes, with the help of the book. They crossed Lake Laberge, the Windy Arm, and Mud Lake. They were looking for the canyon described by Miner Bruce. They saw that the Yukon was running very swiftly; it was "black, and a big comb in the center," in Rothenberg's words. As they sailed along looking for the canyon, Rothenberg spotted a pair of red drawers tied in a tree. He said to Stork, "That's a danger sign. Pull to the shore." Sure enough, about ¼ mile away was the canyon. Stork went to go see it. It was a very bad place, says Rothenberg. Stork returned from his scouting run, and took his boots off, which prompted Rothenberg to ask him why he'd done so. Stork said he wasn't going to die with his boots on.

The canyon was a mile long, with a whirlpool in the center 150 yards in diameter. If a boat slipped off the comb it was in the whirlpool. The water was low, and that made conditions worse. They made it through, though they did get caught in the whirlpool for a bit. They went through a series of rapids just below the canyon, though Miner Bruce hadn't mentioned them. They found out later they were the Squaw Rapids, but at that point they assumed they were the Whitehorse Rapids. Then the river made an abrupt right turn and Rothenberg looked down it and saw 2 miles of whitewater. Stork saw it next and swore and started "to pull." They happened to make it through the rapids, though the comb was above their heads and there were "rocks on each side like shark teeth."

Just below the Whitehorse Rapids the water is very calm (before Lake Bennett). Stork suggested landing. He got out of the boat and said "Come on" to Rothenberg. But Rothenberg couldn't get up because his knees were shaking so badly from the scare. They crossed Lake Bennett, into the Thirtymile, which Rothenberg didn't find dangerous, though the next year he heard several outfits were lost there. They arrived at the Five Finger Rapids. Miner Bruce neglected to mention which of the three passages through the rapids was the safest. They chose the middle passage, which was the wrong one, but again they made it through, bailing lots of water.

They floated down the Yukon to the mouth of the Klondike. There they saw many tents and men on the beach. They landed here, at Dawson, and began to mine. Provisions became very scarce when the big rush arrived. The NAT Co. shut their doors and even miners who'd put their orders back in the spring could only get 1 sack of flour, 15 lbs. of bacon, and 10 lbs. of beans. Prices were all right until grub became scarce. Discouraged people went down to St. Michael and sold their outfits. In order to buy the flour that came with these returned outfits, people had to buy the whole outfit, at \$3 per lb., which came out to over \$100.

Candles, Rothenberg tells, were about \$1 each at that time. The town had black marketers who sold them for less, though. One time the bartender at the Green Tree wanted candles, and a couple guys said they had 2 boxes of candles, which they wanted \$75 each for. The bartender chewed them down to \$50/box. (The candles all this time were actually made of frozen water and powdered milk.) Someone came along and wanted to buy the candles. The bartender said the price was \$120/box. They opened up the boxes and the "candles" were now water. The bartender let out an expletive like Rothenberg has never heard in all his frontier days.