

Albro Gregory of Nome Telling the Story of  
FRED CRANE'S FUNERAL

Albro Gregory, the editor of the Nome Nugget newspaper, describes the funeral and burial of Fred Crane, colorful Alaskan lawyer and at the time of his death the District Attorney for Nome.

Crane practiced law in Kotzebue and Fairbanks. Probably some other towns in Alaska, too, but not noted on this tape.

Crane died in February, 1969 in Seattle. He had a lung condition that required surgery. According to Gregory, his "current chick" took him to Seattle for the surgery. He died following the surgery. She had him embalmed, an unusual occurrence for Nome dead (no undertaker in Nome so bodies are buried without the embalming process).

The funeral was held in two parts. Because of the frozen ground in Nome in winters, bodies are held until the spring thaw and buried then. Normally, Gregory said, the city would bury the dead as soon as they could get a grave dug, and most times the families did not know when their dearly departed were buried. The bodies were stored in a tent-like shack at the cemetery during the cold winter months.

Crane was out of favor with the Catholic Church, but the Catholic priest allowed the funeral service to be conducted in his church without his participation. The rites were conducted by the American Legion and the Pioneers of Alaska. The hearse was the city ambulance. It was about minus 35 degrees that day and windy. After the services in the church ...rather during those Legion services, the Legion bugler was sent outside to await the signal for "taps". By the time he got the signal his bugle was frozen and his hands were cold, not to mention his lips when he placed them on the cold metal horn. Nothing happened so he was motioned back into the church and instructed to thaw out his horn. While he held the horn over the stove, the congregation visited with each other. Finally the taps were blown and the funeral was completed.

After the funeral the body was hauled to the shack at the cemetery. Crane's casket was placed on top of that of a woman named Willehema (Willemena) something-or-other. Some wag suggested that Fred Crane was just where he wanted to be all his life, lying on top of some woman!

Judicial officials from around the state went to Nome for the funeral. Judge Sanders allowed testimonials in his court, but the court was adjourned to the Board of Trade Saloon for the better and more descriptive testimonials to the late Fred Crane. Besides, Jim West (owner of Board of Trade) had put many cases of champagne on ice just for the occasion.

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A proper wake was held. During the funeral all the saloons in Nome closed for an hour and a half. First time that had ever happened in Nome (for a funeral) according to Gregory.

A justice of the Supreme Court was there and he got bombed on the champagne. He had to get back to Anchorage that night so he was loaded into the ambulance, strapped into the stretcher, and taken to the airport. He came to on way to airport, was convinced that he was only drunk and not going to the cemetery or hospital. He was put in front section of plane and sobered up on his way home. *by the driver*

At the burial in the spring someone lost his grip on the rope as Crane's coffin was being lowered into the grave. The casket fell and landed at a 20 to 30 degree angle. The thump jarred the casket lid open and Fred's feet were exposed. People wondered what they would do to fix the mess when the undertaker -in his bib overalls- came up and said, "Come on, you bastards! Start covering the God damned grave right now." (this according to Gregory, of course) "So clunk, clunk went the chunks of permafrost on top of the casket."

Gregory talks about burial procedures in Nome (burying bodies in spring when they can dig the ground).

The cemetery is city owned. The city does not charge for plots. Used since 1913 when a bad, bad storm washed out graves on the sand spit.

Albro said he went to Nome 23 Dec. 1968 from Petersburg. He bought the Nome Nugget April 1, 1971. Nugget is the oldest continually published paper in Alaska, he says. It was established in May of 1901. At one time there were six newspapers in Nome... Nome Weekly News, the Cronicle Nugget (forerunner of Nome Nugget). J.A.F. Strong worked on the early Nugget.

Albro is the sole person on the editorial staff. He has an Eskimo girl named Lola Sheldon who operates the typesetter and does make up. He also has a part time bookkeeper. Two carrier girls and two carrier boys round out the staff.

Albro's wife Adelaid died Oct. 30, 1973. She was buried in Nome Nov. 3, 1973. Married in Whitehorse, Y.T. Canada on March 4, 1961. Died of cncer. Married in home of Harry Boyle, publisher of the Whitehorse Star.

Albro first went to Fairbanks. There were no jobs so he went to Anchorage where he got a job as ~~fixxx~~ feature editory on the Anchorage News. The editor, Clif Cernick, moved to Fairbanks and D. asked Albro to go with him, which he did. That was in 1957. Then he worked for Jessen's Weekly. In 1961 he went to Ketchikan for three or four years. Then to Juneau where he was editor of the Juneau Empire. Hicke had him fired and Albro went north to Fairbanks again where he had been promised a job doing PR for Alaska 67. He said Senator Gruening got him the job. But when he got himself, his wife and belonging moved to Fairbaks there was no job!

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Lew Williams in Ketchikan heard about it and offered Albro job with the Petersburg Press.

Albro talks about a young couple who disappeared on the highway. Met the couple in Tok and came up on their car idling. Never found out what happened to them.

Went to Nome in December, 1968 to manage the Nugget. Charley Willis of Alaska Airlines owned the paper. Albro bought it April 1, 1971 from Willis.

Talk about the Nome city council voting to close the bars on election day. Terrible tragedy for hard drinking Nome (9 bars, 8 churches, couple thousand people in 1974).