

Reflections on IRENE MARY SHERMAN of Fairbanks

summer, 1973

Mrs. Clara Rust reads article on Irene Mary Sherman from the "Alaska Magazine" written by Chuck Darby of Fairbanks. It appeared in the February, 1973 issue.

Mrs. Rust give background on Irene...from Mrs. Rust's recollection. Irene's grandparents managed the Third Avenue Hotel which was on Cushman Street between Third and Fourth Avenues. The Flora Dora dancehall was on the corner of Fourth and Cushman at that time (all this in 1908).

Agnes, daughter of the hotel operators, married J.P. Sherman who was reluctant to marry the girl. She had a baby girl and would take the baby to all the dances. Eagles Lodge had to tell her to get a baby sitter for her baby. Finally her husband took her out on his trap line. One time she (Agnes) went out on the line to look for Sherman and took the baby along in its box that was attached to a sled. The baby froze to death before Agnes got back to the cabin. Meanwhile, Agnes was expecting another baby...probably Irene. Agnes came back into Fairbanks and was "hanging around". Nobody knew what happened to Sherman. Agnes was around by herself all the time.

Interviewer Mike Dalton and Mrs. Rust talk about Sherman's death in approximately 1968. He was a guest at the Pioneers Home in Sitka at the time of his death.

Agnes went down to Nenana and became more or less a tramp, taking up with different men. She returned to Fairbanks when her daughter Irene was about 5 years old. She was running around Fairbanks with a "colored" man named Ben Green. He drove a truck.

Agnes and her child (or children) lived in a little cabin across the street from the old Eagles Hall (Fifth Avenue just off Cushman). Gordon's Store, then a warehouse, and then the little log cabin. Agnes would go ride around with Green and leave Irene and her 12 or 13 month old baby alone. The neighbors around the neighborhood complained that the colored man was hanging around. The authorities told Green to stay away from Agnes. There was an old colored lady down near Fifth and Barnett name Cloy. She did washing for the girls on the "line" and did a little bootlegging on the side. AGnes was at Cloy's house one Sunday afternoon drinking beer with Green. She claimed she had a baby sitter, but there wasn't one in the cabin. Fire broke out in Agnes' cabin. In the cabin were Irene (the oldest), another little girl about four who was the daughter of "Dirty Face" Porter, a little boy about four or five and a baby.

Clara Rust's husband Jess was in the Eagles Hall with the Eagles drill team. Paul Rickert was head of the drill (Rickert had the big farm here). About where 12th Avenue started. Dr. Sutherland was the pianist for the Eagles drill team. A man burst into the hall and called for the fire department because the cabin across the way was afire. The door was locked from the outside. The men could

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two little faces against the window. They broke the window and got two children out, but one cried that "her baby brother was in there". The firemen broke the door in and knocked the baby out of its carriage or crib. The baby already was pretty charred and did not live long afterward.

Mrs. Rust said Agnes had gone off and left the kids and the kids got cold. The interior of the cabins were inflammable (cloth and paper finish on ceilings and walls). Kids started a fire in the stove with paper which flared up and caught the interior afire.

Irene was sent out to Seattle for treatment later. She stayed Outside about 10 years. Discuss the age of Irene at time of fire. Clara swears the fire was in 1924. Alaska Magazine article says Irene is currently 64 so that would make her 13 or 12 at the time of the fire. Clara remembers her as younger at the time of the fire, but memories get jumbled.

Agnes went to Nenana and lived there. She died there. Irene came back from the Outside and lived with her mother for a while in Nenana. When Irene next came back to Fairbanks Clara remembers her with a little boy (Irene's son).

Dalton says Irene has talked to her about her son more than once. This summer Irene was expressing concern about him. She had not heard from him for about five years. Since he had diabetes she feared that he might be dead.

Authorities took her boy away from Irene because she did not care for him properly.

Agnes had another baby in Nenana but she refused to have anything to do with it. Mrs. Wally Burnett (who acted as midwife in the delivery of the baby) cared for the infant and eventually adopted her. The baby was reared by the Burnetts. Her name was Frances. She later married a man by the name of Jacobs who ran the men's store where Sach's Mens' Store is today.