

H81-54/55
Ind. record:
1142-95960
XEROX

Interview of Alfred Lomen.
By Mark Massion
October 24, 1981
Island Homes, Fairbanks

Reminiscences, 1920-1945

Minutes into tape	Counter	Summary
0.02	1	Born in Nome, 9/5/18. Family in Nome since 1900. Grandfather and Uncle Carl first members to arrive.
.46	14	Mother's father Fleiman arr. 1898, on way to St. Michael, ship froze in.
.32	27	Worked in grocery business 'til '49.
1.48	32	Family history in gold business is that of great investment, no return.
2.20	42	Anecdote of family land producing money, but no gold.
4.25	78	Estimate of no. of gold hunters with success. Few of thousands.
6.06	105	Fate of broken miners--blue tickets to Seattle (one way).
7.30	130	Blue tickets used to rid towns of unsavorites before winter.
9.05	150	Winter events;dances, sports in large halls, fewer as town entered low ebb.
12.42	200	Indoor baseball, basketball, theater. Much home entertainment. Tight knit society.
13.53	216	Mother had two table tops, sized to no. of guests, 12 or 16.
14.32	224	His parents entertained explorers, Lindberg and wife in '32. Roald Amundsen was friend of family.
16.49	253	Story of 1923 Amundsen stop in Nome on "Maud" to sell excess supplies. Effect of supplies on town.

Lomen

21.42	310	Same goodies available to kids as elsewhere, most staples shipped, some growing. Lettuce saved off plates to use again.
23.38	331	Little use of local meat and fish--not much there. Some wildfowl. Reindeer not game, owned by natives and Co.
25.51	355	Native subsistence; fishing, sealing. Outside town some went for walrus, seal. Reindeer imported at turn of century to take place of game.
26.50	371	'46-'47 First moose wandered through area. Natural drifting. More since then.
28.21	381	Communication; mail brought to Valdez by boat from Seattle, dogsled to Nome.
29.50	396	Pete Hearn, from Soloman, carried mail with 32 dog team.
30.40	405	To get to Seattle in winter required dog team to rail head.
31.12	410	1920 Leonard Seppla made 30 day trip to Fairbanks with Grandfather Loman in 20 days.
31.57	417	First use of planes in area. Among others, his father made trip to Fairbanks in 2 days for \$800--would have been 30 days for \$1000 w/ dog team.
34.01	437	Previous planes in area--Black Oak Squadron from N.Y., training, also 1924 sailing ship brought a Jennie that flew around a little. His father loved to fly, took any excuse.
39.32	487	Parents were members of N.Y. Explorers Club, helped by many explorers. Story of salvage/rescue operations w/ planes near Siberia.

Lomen

Side B

- .17 6 As part of salvage operation, Russians flew metal Junkers with ability to land on rough land w/out gear. Morris Slipnave (?) pilot, Fabial Fereif(?) mechanic.
- 2.39 50 Slipnave appeared again in '34 with planes bought in Fairbanks for another rescue mission. Hired Bill Lavery and Clyde Armistad to mechanic. He visited with family, was later executed in a Russian purge.
- 8.00 136 Description of Russian icebreaker "Krassen"
- 11.08 181 Influence of Nome's few Federal officials.
- 12.05 195 No Circuit Court at time, only resident judge. His Grandfather Lomen had been Federal judge, '21-'31.
- 13.08 208 Beginning of the reindeer industry. Imported from Siberia in 1880, 1900's. 1200 brought to give Eskimos food. Lack of training brought Lapps over to help. Discussion of Lapps and society.
- 18.26 274 Population of reindeer doubles in three years, so Lomen's herd grew quickly.
- 18.51 280 Earliest memories of Herding days-- father gone a lot flying out to check on remote herds for months at a time.
- 19.54 292 Largest herd at Buckland, N. Seward Pen. and near Kotebue. Area divided between Native herd, and and that of his family.
- 20.58 304 Town mildly aware of the size of the industry, having financed some of it, even with low ebb of economy at time.
- 23.07 328 Lomen's tried to promote sale of meat, hides, etc. Extensive Christmas dealings w/ live animals.
- 26.20 363 Tamed the deer quickly for Christmas teams.

27.20	373	Some tried to keep deer in South, but it failed.
28.12	380	Meat sales difficult, shops not equipped, sales methods not always good.
29.16	393	Market was building in '20's, with a slow start. Major transportation problems, with Alaska Steamship Co. refusing to give more cold storage.
30.24	405	To help with finance, Arthur and Leonard Baldwin of N.Y. City funded expansion in Spring of '26. Lomen's built corrals, stores, bought own ship which put them in competition w/ Alaska Steam.
32.27	425	'29 Crash, Lomens' had 25,000 carcasses in Seattle for sale, showing extent of business, and extent of problem during Crash. Finally went into the dog food business (White Rover).
34.45	447	Father and Uncle still into reindeer business until '32 or '33, when they put it into a "holding pattern." When no future evident, gave over to Government that had tried to take over for years.
37.45	474	Family had been investigated about 5 times by Gov't committees, never guilty, never acquitted.
38.37	483	Was Alaska well represented? Gov't interplay with people is complex, Federal officials in area had flexible sphere of influence.
40.55	503	Commercial antagonists from Lomens' shipping and reindeer were very strong. Ak. Steam, Ak R.R., both wanted business, competition overlapped, many factors made business almost impossible.
Side C		
.25	7	Bureaucracy and Congress helped in their own way to kill the reindeer industry.
1.27	27	Hearings of previous years reflected difficulties.
2.10	40	His father, as Jr. partner of firm, had more freedom to be emotional on issues than elder brother. Once accused, under oath, Ray Limond Wilbur, Sec. of Int. of being either a knave or a fool. No one made any disputing comment.
5.06	74	Rumor began on cruelty of Alfred's father, for facetious remark on throwing Eskimos overboard if a ship couldn't stop at port.

- 7.30 112 1934, Nome burned. Description of family's attempts to help and subsequent losses.
- 10.24 157 Damage report of fire--entire business section.
- 11.44 175 Lomens lost house, family has never since been in Nome all at once together.
- 12.09 182 Alfred studied mining engineering at UAF, mined in Nebraska for a year, then went back into transportation business, then was drafted.
- 13.13 196 Had low draft number, was in service March '41. Asked for Northern service, was acclimated, was sent to California and Oklahoma. '43 assigned to Nome as transportation officer.
- 15.00 220 While there, in a two week period, base set Army record for freight handling per ship, per day. Spent rest of war in Dutch Harbour and Anchorage.
- 16.37 240 Found great changes in state from Army's presence. Especially in building airports. Problems arose in Nome in '41, though, because construction workers were paid far higher than anyone had *been* before. Threw off local economy.
- 19.11 271 Great military activity evident, as well. More than was mentioned Outside. Troop movements to retake Attu, etc. greater than reported. Much activity with planes to Russians at Ladd Field.
- 23.00 316 Field in Nome refueling point for planes to Russia. 50 planes in field one night during storm. One flight group got lost in fog, planes fell all over. Only one got to Siberia.
- 329 End of Dialogue