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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

ROBERT MARTIN, SR.
Juneau, Alaska
April 3, 1986

by: Conner Sorensen

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C.S.: Let me just start by saying that my name is Conner Sorensen and I'm here with Robert Martin, Sr. in his home in Juneau, Alaska. And this is April the third, I believe. Is that a correct date?

R.M.: Right.

C.S.: April the third, 1986. And we would like to talk this morning, Robert, about some things that happened fifty years ago, approximately. Back in the 1930's. Now the topic of the project we've been working on is Alaskan Native participation in the CCC. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about yourself and where you were born, where you grew up. Something that takes us up to the thirties and the 3C days.

R.M.: Okay. I was born in Sitka, to Matilda Plotnikov [ph] in Sitka and in 1915 in October, she moved over here with me and my older sister and we -- I grew up and my older sister went to live with someone else, one of my aunts. And I went with my parents. After my mother married Bill Martin in 1921, we went up to Yakutat and on to Cordova where he worked at Kenicott Copper, first on the railroad and then in the copper mines itself in Kenicott. And in 1921 when prejudice was prevalent against Indian hire, my mother had quite a time getting

me into school there because as a first grader I had to start that year. As it was I was a trifle late because in 1921 I was already seven years old. And she got me -- I don't know what she said to superintendent of schools but she finally got me in. I was the only Indian child going to this Cordova territorial school. But in October we moved back to Juneau and I, of course entered the Juneau Bureau of Education school. My teacher's name was Helen Burnhoffer [ph]. And she taught me until I went to finish the eighth grade. We moved from a shell-like building behind what used to be the government hospital, into what later became the teenage club and is now the site of the Auke Tribe council building in the village. I entered Juneau High School in 1928 and in the same year I joined the Alaskan Native Brotherhood, camp number two in Juneau. The way I got in was, I used to go with my father to the meetings and the president didn't have a secretary because the secretary had left and so he asked me if I could take the minutes. And I said I could try, I've done it in grade school. So, he said well I'll help you. And after being very fair at taking minutes and being there every meeting, they decided that I should become a member and so I was I sworn in as a member of the Alaskan Native Brotherhood, local camp. And the president at the time was one of the founders of the Alaskan Native Brother. And from then I decided that

the goals and the achievements to the time of the Alaskan Native Brotherhood was such that I could be of some help even in my young age. I felt that I could be doing something for my people. When during high school I played basketball and tried to get on a team and finally made it one year in my junior year and then just before a tournament in Haines I was left at home and the senior, a non-Indian, was put in my place. I felt bad for the young fellow, because when they came back he had

05-10 a bad knee that he could never take part in athletics again. But that same year, 1931, I quit school and stayed out of school until 1937 when I went back to Sheldon Jackson and asked Mr. Yaw if I could come back and finish and get my high school diploma so I could get away from using pick and shovel and so -- and it was during this time when between '31 and '37 that I ran into this problem with the 3C's. Walter Soboleff and Gibson and I went to the Forest Service and asked to be enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps. And they put us through all the filling out of applications and then physicals and when we were all through with that we were told to come back and when we did come back, we were told that they weren't hiring Natives, the bureau or somebody's mistakes. And at the time there was no Bureau of Indian Affairs as such, it was under the Board of Education, that the Indians were taken care of. And Charles W. Hawksworth was the superintendent and he had

all the teachers under him in Alaska. And I forget the other man that came from the South every year to check on the schools. And so I never finished high school in Juneau but I went back to Sheldon Jackson and finished in 1939. About two months before I graduated from Sheldon Jackson I discovered I didn't need to go for two years at all, I could have finished in one year but that's neither here nor there. And from then on I still kept going -- working with the Alaskan Native Brotherhood. And I served as officers in both local camps and in the grand camp. And finally ending up as grand president and after completing two terms I became a member of the executive committee which is a lifetime affair. If there are any questions, I would be glad to answer.

C.S.: Sure. Could tell me a little bit more about the incident with Walter Soboleff and getting to know yourself? That was in Sitka, I understand?

R.M.: Yes, it was in Sitka. I used to go there every summer looking for work.

C.S.: And this was 1934?

R.M.: Yes. Um-hum, '33 or 1934, I'm not too sure now. Walter may remember the exact dates but it was in the early thirties. And I watched the fellows leaving on the ranger -- I forget six or seven used to have boats, Forest Service had boats called the rangers -- number. And all those young fellows from Sitka going out with

them. Among them was Bill Holly who was as much Indian as I was but he never lived in the village and to all intents and purposes he was one of those that had given up their Indian heritage. Bill is still alive today and I believe lives in Ketchikan.

C.S.: Did you expect to be hired?

R.M.: Well, when they put us through all those things we figured they sure would take us because we were free and we had no strings to hold us in town because the work out in the Forest Service -- in Forest Monuments or whatever you call it. And they were cleaning trails and building new ones, so they were out of town all the time and we had nothing to hold us in Sitka so we felt certain we would have been hired. We were clean and ...

C.S.: Did you know anything about Forest Service hiring practices at that time?

R.M.: No, I didn't. It was a surprise to me when they told us that the Indian Service would take care of us. And you

10-15 know, strangely enough when I come back in the winter to Juneau, I never did go to work for the CWA or whatever they called it. Yeah, I guess it was the CWA.

C.S.: It was the CWA at first, and then it was the CCC.

R.M.: Yeah, then I never did work for either one. But when I went back and finished high school I went to work for 3C's that was doing a lot of work on totem poles and then that seawall between the cold storage and the

Federal Building which is all handwork by the way, done by Indians. And the totem poles, of course.

C.S.: This is in Sitka?

R.M.: Yes, that was in '38, '39, '40. Then in 1940 in early spring our foreman got a job with the contractors on Japonski Island and he took many of us with him, that he could depend on that could work with him. We were building a corduroy road up Cascade Creek so they could haul supplies to build a new dam up there, a water dam. And from there we went -- when that was finished and he left that service and we went with another foreman. I ended up being a truck driver, a flatbed truck driver on Japonski Island with Nick KasaKan. We were the only two Indians driving trucks, by the way. Even there the unions were discriminating against us. We couldn't even join the union as a -- it's not a full member but one that pays so much a month just for the privilege of working. Nick did finally get in as truck driver in the teamsters union and you know strange teamsters or ...

C.S.: Who is this Nick ...?

R.M.: Kasakan. His sister is Esther Littlefield who still lives in Sitka.

C.S.: So you were told that the Indian Service was taking care of Indian employment?

R.M.: That they were going to take care of us. They felt that they were going to find work for us. Well, that was what they told us, that they were going to find work for

us. But we never did. I went to work for the cold storage and got by that way and later at the cannery when salmon seining season opened. I never was without a job, I really didn't have to worry. I made more money than the 3C gang did, but it was -- you know, you feel pretty bad when they do something like that to you.

C.S.: One time you told me about the different agencies, the federal agencies especially in their hiring practices, like the Bureau of Fisheries. Remember you talked about that, the Forest Service, the Indian Service? Could you say something about your impression of each one of those and what their attitude was towards indian hiring?

R.M.: Before I went to work for the Federal Service as postmaster in Kake, I used to notice that there was Indians but they were usually close to the doors so that if you entered the door you would see an Indian sitting there making you think that there was other Indians in the building. We called it window dressing later on, when we discovered the truth and we had to -- of course in federal service you have to pass a test in order to get a job. And even then that didn't guarantee you a job. So it may be two or three others on the register that are higher than you are and they were the ones that got the jobs. I got the job of postmaster in Kake by political means. And Bob Bartlett happened to know me from my work with Alaskan Native Brotherhood and when my name went in, he withdrew this previous person's name

and put mine in and I got the job. It's pure and simple.

15-20

C.S.: What about the Bureau of Fisheries, the Federal Bureau of Fisheries?

R.M.: The Federal Bureau of Fisheries, as far as know never hired any Indians. And the only Indian that ever worked was a guide who was a son or grandson to the Richard Harris that came with Joe Juneau, his name was John Harris. John Harris, Sr. And that's the only time and that was only for a short period. In fact -- the strange thing, he put a Bureau of Fisheries boat on a shoal in Young Bay. I guess maybe that's why they didn't hire him again. And the Bureau of Indian Affairs, even if you went into -- after they came full force to Juneau -- you go in there and in different departments you find a few Indians, maybe one or two, more window dressing. Until -- Of course all this time, the ANB had been working on this and trying to -- not trying to force but trying to integrate the Indians into the working employment picture of Juneau in the federal government. I don't know why it was but I tried several times to get into the Bureau under the employment assistance program but I never did make it. The only way I got in with the Bureau after I moved here in 1959 was I passed my - what do you call that ...

C.S.: Civil Service.

R.M.: Civil Service exam in accounting of some sort, not full accounting but an accounting clerk test. So I got in as a payroll clerk and from there I worked my way up to finally becoming an enrollment officer because of my knowledge of the people in Alaska, especially in Southeast -- to work on the Tlingit-Haida enrollment which was done in the old way that the Bureau does it under regulations and everything else. Where everybody had to have proof of birth, certificate of baptismal record or an affidavit signed by someone that knew the parents and that the child was born to them. So I stayed with that job. In fact I worked for the Bureau for over twenty years and I worked for the Post office for thirteen and a half years. So I had thirty-three years in federal service and I worked for the state government for three years in the fish and game department.

C.S.: Back to that 1934 incident, when you and Soboleff and Young were not hired, was that taken up by the ANB as sort of a test case?

R.M.: I don't know whether ours was. It might of been ours because Gibson Young's father is Ralph Young, who is one of the organizers of the Alaskan Native Brotherhood and I think he may be the one that took it before the ANB and told them what happened. And then at the convention -- I know that there was a motion to look into this and find out more about it and the grand president was

empowered to do all this and being -- I think it was Cyril Zuboff at the time, and he did carry it until he got some answers.

C.S.: Did you know about a similar incident down there around Ketchikan?

R.M.: No, I didn't.

C.S.: Something like that happened about the same time in Ketchikan, but you hadn't heard ...

R.M.: No, I hadn't heard about that. Of course communications such as it was in those days, you don't find out things like you do today.

C.S.: Could you tell me something about the important people in the ANB and also in federal agencies that were doing hiring in those days? For instance, you mentioned Cyril Zuboff - that name comes to mind - Don Miller ...

R.M.: C. Don Miller.

C.S.: Frank Booth?

R.M.: C. Don Miller and Frank Booth. C. Don Miller was a grand treasurer for many years. He's out of Wrangell, but he actually wasn't an Indian, he was a minority but I'm not sure exactly what he was. But Ralph Young, Sr. in Sitka and Frank Price, Sr. -- and, who was there -- [indisc.] was grand president, Cyril Zuboff, Andrew Hope. Paul Liberty had passed on so he was gone. He was one of the organizers. And here in Juneau we had Seward Coons and Frank Mercer and James Watson, who

20-25 passed on real early in the late twenties, and in Klawock there is James C. Johnson who was one of the organizers and lived until almost the fifties I think. And in Wrangell it's Chester Worthington who was one of the organizers. And one of outspoken ones, Frank Desmond for one, who had a son, Livingston, who is one of the great athletes of Indian origin. Of course Sandy Stevens was grand secretary. He was from Douglas and he has some children still living in Juneau. And of course Walter Soboleff in the '29, thirties was a member of the ANB. In fact I think he was grand secretary at one time in those years and ...

C.S.: Could you describe the goals of the ANB at that time?

R.M.: In the early twenties the Alaskan Native Brotherhood's greatest purpose was getting education for the children and anyone that wanted to learn. And from that time on when they won their first case in Ketchikan, the -- I forget the young man's name who was in -- his sister was in that. Anyway, the ANB accomplished many things that are beneficial to the Natives. As well as the whites, we fought the fish trap. That was another big thing in those early days. We didn't do anything about fish traps as a territory or as a state until we became a State and gained recognition for Native rights as citizens - that was in the twenties. And won the right for Natives to vote - that was in the twenties. And integrated public schools - that didn't happen until

into the thirties. Extended workman's compensation laws to cover everyone, not just -- and including Natives in aid to dependent children. Secured direct relief for aged Natives. And that was a joke in a way because I remember, cashing a check for an old man that lived across the street from where I had the post office in Kake. He was getting all of twenty dollars a month and expected to live on it. And brought the Indian Reorganization Act to Alaska and brought hospitals for Natives to Alaska, now under the U.S. Public Health Service, now contracted in Edgecumbe -- is contracted to SEARHC and so is a Juneau clinic. And got the equal rights law which I suppose you read about.

C.S.: I did, just the other night in the paper.

R.M.: Then they initiated the Tlingit-Haida land suit in 1929 at the Haines convention.

C.S.: How do you see employment issues as fitting into these other goals?

R.M.: Well, they come up in every convention until it was in resolution form directed to the delegate in Congress before we became a State and then to the Governor and his staff and to the legislature. We did everything by law if at all possible. We never used sit down strikes or anything like that to gain our ends. We went always by law and never by force. So that was the exciting thing about the ANB's way of doing things. I remember one incident from a convention -- the Juneau Empire

would never print anything about the convention being held here in Juneau in 1933. And Louis Paul who is William Paul's bother came up with a resolution and he did it because the Empire wouldn't print anything, but this one resolution was to sell the panhandle of Alaska to the Canadian government, and that of course hit the papers finally. And today I see the new Juneau Empire Building has Indian art on its building. That is quite a changeover. They still don't print too much about us.

C.S.: What about some of the politicians during the thirties? For instance you mention the delegate, Anthony Dimond. What was ...?

25-30

R.M.: That was Wickersham and then Dimond and then ...

C.S.: How do do see him as ...?

R.M.: Anthony Dimond was really a big help to us in Congress although he was a nonvoting representative from Alaska. Yet he did a lot to help the Indian people, especially through the ANB. At the time the ANB was the only organization. In fact it is the oldest Indian organization that still runs in the United States. And after Anthony Dimond, came Bob Bartlett, who of course everyone knows is a fair man and always tried his best to help the people.

C.S.: How do you account for Anthony Dimond's attitude?

R.M.: Politics. We gave him the votes and he got in. And we controlled Indian votes in those days. Today Stevens

doesn't even attend our conventions, he goes to the AFN. Young doesn't attend our conventions, neither does Murkowski. And one of these days we're going to wake up to the fact that they aren't doing anything for us and they are going to lose a big block of votes. It's not a threat, it just happens.

C.S.: What about Governor Troy?

R.M.: Governor Troy was anti-Indian from the word go. Always had been, I guess, until his death. We couldn't go to him for anything.

C.S.: Earnest Gruening?

R.M.: Gruening was a big help to Indians. He helped push the Equal Rights Amendment with us. He helped [indisc.] Elizabeth. Like Vern mentioned [referring to "Anti-Discrimination Act 1945 to Present" by Vern Metcalfe, "My Turn," Juneau Empire, April 1, 1986], took him along -- tells the story about how he asked him about the Equal Rights Bill and Governor Gruening talked to him and talk to him and talk to him and Vern didn't get a word in edgewise, which is hard to believe, until he was finished. I guess it's being -- [indisc.] -- my people that's discriminated against to -- I guess there is reasons why Gruening -- well, you know what Gruening's nationality is, I mean where he was born.

C.S.: No, I don't.

R.M.: Well, I've heard that he was Jewish or Hebrew, they always discriminated against them.

C.S.: There was a ...

R.M.: He was professor, wasn't he, in -- as a ...

C.S.: I don't know much about his early background ...

R.M.: I think he was.

C.S.: ... before he came to Alaska.

R.M.: And in law too, I guess ...

C.S.: When I talked with Jensen Brown, he mentioned Mayor Goldstein who was also Jewish ...

R.M.: Isador Goldstein, yeah ...

C.S.: And who was sympathetic to Native issues.

R.M.: He was. He could talk the Tlingit language as fluently as I can, almost. And his sister is Anabel Simpson, and that was just a reverse and yet Annabel Simpson's son Robert was my classmate in high school. And he was some big help to me at all times. There was four of us that traveled together. Bob Simpson, Bob Maclean, Bob Henning and myself. And one time we were in the Imperial and somebody yelled, Hey Bob, and we all turned at the same time. It's strange, the people in my own peer group, these people are high up there -- children of business people, and they got along swell with me. I mean I got along swell with them. But my own peer group -- but my Dad made a lot more money than some of those children I went to high school -- I mean their parents. And yet we were side-washes, that's what they called us. I don't know what the word means, I never did like it, I don't even use it today if I can get away with it.

C.S.: Haven't said anything really about the Depression. Do you have memories of what the Depression was and what it meant to you or to your ...

30-35

R.M.: The Depression forced us to go back and live off our subsistence. My dad and his brothers would go out and get the fish and meat and my mother and sisters would cure it and smoke it or salt it, whichever. The salmon was always smoked which keeps that way. And then we -- my dad and I would cut cord wood, which was under Bob Lesher. He was a captain in the Salvation Army for a awhile and then he took [indisc.] leave of absence and paid us five dollars a cord for three ricks of wood, had to be sawed up, chopped up and piled and in regular three rick cords.

C.S.: Was that in Juneau?

R.M.: It was right here in Juneau. Flour we got from, I guess -- the Department of Agriculture, was the one dishing out the flour and since we had five living sisters and myself and my sister was already -- she got married in -- yeah she was already married in the early thirties and she had several girls and a boy herself. But that's how we kept going. I worked in a restaurant in the early thirties washing dishes for twelve-and-a-half a week plus all I could eat. I tried not to make it any harder for my parents. So I was willing to do that. So after doing that for a few months, I finally got

promoted to day shift and made fifteen dollars a week. That's why -- I'd always make enough money to get over to Sitka because my aunt and uncle, William Peterson and his wife had adopted me as one of their sons, after they lost their son, Joe. So I had a home over there that I could go to and live there and work from their house. Of course I helped with whatever I could earn. Chopping wood, which was what made me so healthy. That was my chore wherever I went. That is my impression -- we never as a family had it very hard because my dad was always able to get a job then -- he made fairly good wages in the AJ Mine.

C.S.: What did he do in the mine?

R.M.: Well, he did several things. He was a chute puncher -- chute blaster, which is -- one is loading the cars with a crew. He was in charge of the crew that loaded the ten-ton cars and they divided up into three groups and they had to get out enough trips to make the shift worthwhile. They worked eight-hour shifts and came home. And his brother Herbert was the motor man on his crew. They had, in fact -- they set the record that was never broken, they made fifteen trips of forty-ton cars in an eight-hour shift. He and his crews, two different crews.

C.S.: What was the hiring situation in the mine?

R.M.: The mine was pretty good. They'd take anybody that they knew could work. And the foremen had a lot to do with

who they chose. If my dad wanted a job, he'd just go see one of the foremen that he knew, and the foreman would tell Maclean to hire him, it was that simple. Because he knew what he was doing in a mine. As a chute blaster, he had to keep the chutes clear without ruining the loading gates which was pretty expensive material I guess.

C.S.: Could you tell me something about the Forest Service officials during that time - Charles Flory, for instance?

R.M.: I didn't know Charles Flory too well and I forget the name of the man that came to Sitka to do the hiring for the 3C project. So I can't tell you too much about it. I guess I just blocked it out of my mind because it was a situation that I -- in fact it must have been ANB through someone -- because William Paul got a hold of it and that's how he got started on fighting that discrimination practices and hiring. And so -- because -- Fredrick Paul is writing or trying to write a book and brings this incident into it. But it doesn't say too much about it, just that we were put through the ropes and then told that we couldn't be hired.

C.S.: What about Frank Heintzleman?

R.M.: Frank Heintzleman in the thirties. Say, he's the one that became Governor too, isn't he?

C.S.: Um-hum.

35-40

R.M.: He was good to work for. I worked as I told you before, I worked in the office and did go to work for the 3C's as a timekeeper and typist for foreman and had to -- as many times type something for Heintzleman, and he always treated me fairly because he figured I was a good worker. Oh, we had to prove ourselves an awful lot and I was -- there was a non-Native boy that was in our painting crew. We were painting what later became the ACS building in Sitka next to the Federal Building. And then when he couldn't pass he told me that they wanted me up in the office. I went up there and Dick Tate who was foreman says, type this for me. So I sat down at the typewriter and typed it out for him and handed it back to him. He says, well, starting tomorrow you come here and work as time keeper. That's how I got in. So it was tests, you know one test after another. We just had to prove ourselves. Even working for the contractors we had to prove ourselves. When I quit the ditch gang as we were called -- we worked as a muck stick -- I finished high school here -- I was still here with a muck stick and I told Ernie Torgenson who was foreman, or straw boss - there was another man over him -- he said, I'm quitting as of Friday. I'm going fishing. He says, I hate to lose you. Well, I thought I was the weakest man on your crew. He says, yeah, you might be weak but you put out more work in ten hours than all these others. You work steady, I don't have to

watch you. That's another one where we proved ourselves. It's been like that all my life. We just had to prove ourselves all the time.

C.S.: Were you aware of the Senate hearings that were held here in Juneau in 1936, where this issue of hiring on the CCC came up with it?

R.M.: Vaguely, I heard of it. I think I was in Sitka at the time working and of course busy in the summer. I might have been fishing that year. And you don't get any news out there. There's no radios on the boats. It's like when President Harding died, we were in Chatham. The only reason we found out is that the superintendent got a telegram through their own radio outfit that they had there. You know they had the morse code type. And that's how they found out.

C.S.: Could you tell me something about your knowledge of the Native CCC projects that started after 1936?

R.M.: All I can tell you about are the ones in Sitka. They had to build a -- the Forest Service decided to put a picnic grounds out at Halibut Point. And they had a crew under Mark Jacob, Sr. working out there with axes and adzes and everything they built is out of the forest. They built a bridge with it, they built cabins, not cabins, but shelters through that whole picnic area, and all of that was handwork. And another crew under Ralph Young, Sr. put that seawall in between the cold storage and the Federal Building and that was all

handwork. The only ones that were non-Native were the truck drivers except when I get on the truck and drive, just to get out of the office for a while. And we brought the rocks and the gravel -- so I learned to dump gravel which is what I did mostly. The other fellows got the rocks and loaded it onto trucks and they bring it in. And that was quite a wall. If you look at it, there is no steel, no cement anywhere except in the middle where they actually built an anchor for a float that they were going to put in there. I don't know if they ever did. That is the only place you will find a small bit of concrete and steel and the rest is all rocks moved by hand into position and the face of that wall is fairly smooth except, you know, where the rocks fit into each other. There is nothing holding it but gravel. And there is a crew under Harold Bailey and George Benson out at the park that recarved the poles that were in bad shape and even those poles are now deteriorating pretty fast. And they did a lot of work. All these fellows had to -- got the leaders' pay which

40-45 -- the rest of us were getting. I got assistant leader's pay which was six dollars more than the regular fellows were getting paid.

C.S.: So you worked as a truck driver?

R.M.: Actually my job was timekeeper and clerk typist in the office. But there was times when I didn't have a thing to do and I had to go out and get the extra truck or

have the foreman take me and get a truck and help drive, I mean haul gravel. And I taught some of the other fellows how to drive trucks too. Like Louie Minard. Nick Kasakan, it was no problem teaching him how to drive, he's a natural. He got into a car and took off. He could shift without any trouble and I taught him how to downshift -- those fellows were really cagey about -- because we were losing a lot of drivers -- so they had to do something about it. So that's how I ended up teaching them.

C.S.: Where did you learn how to drive?

R.M.: Here in Juneau. My uncle Dedrick [ph] Kunz taught me how to drive a regular car. From there on I went to Sitka and used to watch the old man who drove a truck in Sheldon Jackson and watch how he did it. So there was no problem knowing the shifting and everything which I got use to it and ...

C.S.: Let me ask you how important do you think that it was that Native men started working on the CCC projects in 1936.

R.M.: It was important to the fact that they had to do something to eat and you know they were -- hunting seasons were short. We were not allowed to go out after seasons. We didn't realize that we had many rights that we could have exercised in those days but we didn't. We tried to stick to the law and so we followed -- and those that did get caught hunting out of season usually

ended up in jail, losing their rifles, and those that used their boats to fish out of season lost their boats and nets and everything else. It wasn't an easy life, we had to be careful all the time. And I know incidents where non-Natives with boats would go up inside the no-fishing line and be in cahoots with some of the Fish and Game people -- Fish and Wildlife people in those days. They would go and find the fish where -- one was actually brothers that did that. One worked for the Fish and Wildlife and his brother was a skipper and this Dick, Richard Tate, who I worked for in the Forest Service, he used to call his brother the biggest fish pirate that ever lived. He says if I had it my way, I would have him jail. It was his own brother. So CCC forced us -- I mean we had to do something to earn a living and that was one way of doing it.

C.S.: I'm going to turn the tape over here.

[End side one, begin side two]

C.S.: You mentioned Mr. Yaw.

R.M.: Um-hum.

C.S.: At Sheldon Jackson.

R.M.: Yes.

C.S.: In some of the research I noticed that he was quite active in promoting Native hire.

R.M.: In fact I think he was the one I talked Andrew Hope into running for the city council in Sitka. It was his first venture into politics. And of course later on Andrew

went on to be a legislator. True, Mr. Yaw was a very -- helpful to us as person in getting things. He allowed us to go from the school to the conventions that were held -- as delegates from Sheldon Jackson's -- junior ANB. And he always allowed us to do that and he always found work for us in order to get through school. Like I was pretty badly crippled in my second year with arthritis in Sheldon Jackson. He hired me to do the early morning and late evening firing on the boilers. So that I got through school and paid my sister's way through school at the same time, for that year. That's how helpful Mr. Yaw was and that was just one of the little things that he did for people.

C.S.: Do you know anything more about him, where he came from?

R.M.: I think he came from the middle states, I'm not exactly sure. But he has a book out that may give that and his -- some what fifty years or so in Alaska. And he still follows Alaska Native Brotherhood way of doing things. In fact he may be an honorary member of the Alaskan Native Brotherhood in Sitka.

C.S.: Is he still alive?

R.M.: Yes.

C.S.: Must be getting along.

R.M.: He remarried too. His wife Caroline passed away several years ago. There was a beautiful person.

C.S.: Well, can you tell me of any of the other people who worked on the crew in Sitka or elsewhere who could tell me something more about the CCC?

R.M.: Well ...

C.S.: People that are still alive.

R.M.: There is hardly anybody still alive that -- because -- Nick Peters is one of the adzmen and axemen, and of course Mark Jacobs, he's gone. He was a foreman and Nick Casacan drowned in Kodiak. He became one of the truck drivers and Ralph Young and George Benson, they are all gone now. Harold Bailey is gone, he was a carver too with George Benson. I used to get a kick out of George Benson and Harold Bailey working side by side. One was left-handed and the other was right-handed so they didn't get into each other's way. But they did beautiful work, you know, in copying the poles. And Nick Peters and his crew, I forget who was all in his crew. They took two cedar logs and joined them together to make that one great big pole that stands in the center above the building now in that park. And that was what they used to make that great big pole. Originally it was one log but they couldn't get one like that again. So they joined two together. And you can't see where, hardly where it is joined and everything. They did such perfect work just with ax and adz. And Harold Bailey of course would stop and talk to me when I go down and take the time with the men that were there

and show me how to use an adz. He says it's all in the wrists. I'd try it and he'd say, No, no, no, and show me again. I got stories and things from the men that were out there and I understood the reasoning behind the totem poles and what they stood for. Contrary to what

05-10 the first missionaries thought, that they were idols that we worshipped.

C.S.: Could you say something about, then, the CCC work as a stage in renewing that art in totem building?

R.M.: I think it did. I think it helped an awful lot because -- they showed pride in these men I mentioned. Benson and Bailey and a few others that -- I don't remember their names now, they're all gone. But they showed pride in their work and that's why they did such a good job. And that they kept it on. I know Benson's livelihood for later years was carving small totems for sale, which he never got paid enough for. But that's what kept him going after the 3C folded so in fact George Benson was Andrew Hope's bother-in-law. Married to Andrew Hope's sister. And Harold Bailey is Robert Loescher's grandfather, who is here with Sealaska.

C.S.: Was this tradition carried directly on by the people who are doing carving nowadays?

R.M.: Yes, it's still being carried on. Like Louie Minard who was one of the fellows I taught to drive a truck who scared the life out of me. He's carving silver now for -- up there at the whatever they call the center at the

park. It's under -- was it Land Management? No ...

C.S.: The National Park Service.

R.M.: The National Park Service. Yeah. So. Of course Esther Littlefield has left there now. She has retired from there. The work they did for the 3C's, they didn't get much money for it, but they showed a lot of pride in their work and you can see it. Because I think every pole in the park was recarved and as well done as the originals.

C.S.: Is there anything that you would ask if you were in my position that I haven't thought of? We are going back fifty years here and it's difficult to recreate the atmosphere and the times, but is there something that you think is important about those days for yourself, the CCC, or the Depression that I haven't asked?

R.M.: We covered the ANB work in all of these and the ANB never stopped. They kept on fighting this discrimination and hiring practices. And they also brought in fairer compensation for work done in the canneries, they almost formed a union at one time, but discovered that it would be unlawful for us to do so we had to drop it. And the ANB has been the one organization that kept the fight up. Other than that I don't think that there is anything more.

C.S.: What do you think, for instance, about the fact when they did start hiring Alaskan Natives for the CCC they

put them in separate camps? They had separate Native crews working on some projects and white crews working on other projects.

R.M.: The only one I know about is the one in Sitka and they were not separated. The only difference was that the mechanic at the shop was white and several of the truck drivers were white. Other than that they all worked together.

C.S.: Oh, they weren't in entirely separate groups in Sitka?

R.M.: No, no the only separateness was that one worked at Halibut Point, one worked in town by the cold storage and the other worked at National Monument with totem poles. But everybody else, I had to keep track of the white crews time as well as the -- and I had to go up there and take inventory at the shop every once and awhile on oil and stuff.

C.S.: Okay. Well, for instance, the crew that worked at Halibut Point, they built picnic areas and recreation facilities out there. Was that a mixed crew? Were there white men and Indians both in the crew?

R.M.: No. For some reason the Indians did it all. I never saw any white person coming to look for a job. For some reason they felt that it was an all-Native project so except for a few, like the truck drivers that came. Other than that, the truck drivers took them to and from work and hauled stuff that they needed. Other than that ...

C.S.: Well, there were white crews working on other projects around Sitka, though ...

R.M.: Well, I had no knowledge of them, it must have been somewhere else.

C.S.: Up on the Mt. Verstovia trail and ...

R.M.: That was done during the time that we got turned down. That was before the Native crews.

C.S.: Earlier ...

10-15

R.M.: Yeah, that was done with that first group of youngsters that got in. At the time the Natives took over -- not took over, did the work, they had specific jobs for them to do. They only time we ever took anybody out was when they had to check out something on the Blue Lake Trail. And Nick Peters took a crew up there of six men. I don't know what they had to do but all I did was keep their time. It only took one day and they were done. And that is quite a hike up to the Blue Lake ...

C.S.: I don't know where that is.

R.M.: ... from Sawmill Creek -- that is, at the end, in Silver Bay. I scared the life out of Nick. He was in a hurry to get out there. He had to get up to Blue Lake and back again before four thirty, I guess it was; we used to have a half hour for lunch. So he says, you be out there to pick us up on time, but don't go back as fast as you came out. I said you were in a hurry. He was my cousin so no problem there. My aunt was his mother.

C.S.: So that was a Native crew, then?

R.M.: Yeah, strictly, um-hum.

C.S.: You see, the reason I ask, I talked to two men over in Sitka, who worked on crews. One was at Silver Lake and that -- they were not Native crews.

R.M.: That was that first crew. Because like I said I had to keep time for everybody, and there was no white crews other than ones that were working with us. They were hauling rocks and working with Ralph Young's crew mostly and he was telling them what to do because he was their leader. That group that you are talking about I think are the ones that came when we first ...

C.S.: It was earlier ...

R.M.: Earlier ...

C.S.: 1933, 1934, 1935.

R.M.: Because when we started it was '39 when I got into it. Of course in Kake, they built a dam and built -- tried to build a breakwater, but the rock wasn't the right type and one person died on that rock fill. William Newton, somehow or another backed -- got behind the truck instead of on the side of it and knocked him into the water and he drowned. Other than those two projects -- that was strictly Indians too. Timekeeper and all. Tommy Jackson could tell you a lot more about that project in Kake. And that dam was quite a feat for Indians. Of course that is no greater feat than moving a building from Treadwell to Juneau for the ANB hall in

1922. It took tide and handwork and the combined horsepower and the two boats that towed the building over on tow barges, it was thirty and I think it was twenty, approximately fifty horsepower and two boats ...

C.S.: Was that the old wooden building that was just torn down here this year or last year?

R.M.: No. That's way before.

C.S.: Way before.

R.M.: It was rebuilt and made bigger and then the Army came in and they needed the area during the war for a depot. In fact they tore that down afterwards and it became the Channel Apartments.

C.S.: Anything else that you would like to mention?

R.M.: Not unless we can think of something later.

C.S.: Okay. Well, we might want to do that. Well, thank you very much.

R.M.: You are quite welcome.