

Summary for H87-82-06

Everett W. Patton is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 11/9/84

Gayle Maloy interviews Everett W. Patton in Fairbanks, AK, on 11/9/84. Patton is 76; he was born April 9, 1908. Patton's father was a Methodist missionary, who brought his family to AK from Portland, OR, in the fall of 1913. They took the train from Portland to Seattle. Patton was 5 at this time, and his brother 7 ½. On the train, they were left alone while their parents had coffee. Patton's brother told him the wire that ran above the seats was the "jumping wire" that you were supposed to jump from the seat and see if you could grab. So Patton jumped up and pulled it, and it turned out to be the emergency brake, of course. When the conductors came back through the train, the boys put on their innocent faces.

They took a boat from Seattle to AK. On it, they were stuck in the middle of the Yukon, and ran out of fresh meat. A young bull moose was swimming the river, however, and the boat pulled up beside him, a deckhand threw a lasso over the animal and winched it up to the deck, where another man hit him between the eyes. The cook came onto the deck with a butcher knife and disemboweled the moose. Patton had never seen an animal butchered, and ran crying to his mother, but enjoyed the moose stew that night.

Finally the boat arrived in Fairbanks. They rode the train into the depot. Parishioners from the church came down, and Andrew Anderson, of Fairbanks Laundry, put all their luggage in the laundry wagon and his faithful horse pulled it across the bridge to the Methodist Church on 3rd Ave., in between 3rd Ave. Hotel and a carpenter's shop.

The bridge was on Turner St. at that time. Every year, of course, this bridge would be destroyed. There was a slough that ran from the Tanana into the Chena, called Piledriver Slough, which they used to help regulate the flow of the river. Now it's become more of a swamp.

They stayed in the church for a short time, until they found that the view of "the line" was an interesting sight to two little boys. Within a week, they'd moved to 7th Ave. and Perry St. Eva McGown was one of their neighbors, a mail-order bride. She came to marry Mr. McGown, a chef at the Arcade Café. When she arrived, she came in on Fred Orr's stage; that night the couple came over to the parsonage and asked Patton's dad to perform the ceremony.

Patton left Fairbanks around WWI because all the young men that worked in the mines left to join the service, and the mines closed. The AK Railroad started to be built in Seward. The Methodist bishop asked Patton's dad to go down there and build a bigger church. So they merged the Fairbanks congregation with the Presbyterian congregation (while Patton's father was gone). The town was dormant until after the AK Railroad arrived, which was when the U. S. Smelting Co. came and built the huge powerhouse and 10 giant gold dredges.

There was a flood in the fall of 1917 (in Seward?), and Patton's mother got ill; the family moved to the States for a while. They arrived in Seattle the day the armistice was signed. They stayed there until 1932. Patton had to quit college when the Depression came on. The last job he had was as a mechanic at a Del Monte plant; he got 12 cents/hr.

and worked 12 hrs. a day. It was clear that he wouldn't be able to pay for college. He sailed steorage to AK; rode the rails to Fairbanks.

Before arriving in Fairbanks, while in Anchorage, Patton signed up at KFQD amateur night playing his harmonica. He won 1st prize and won...a harmonica. But the radio station received a call: A bunch of boys from the Red Top Mine were in town and the ladies entertaining them wanted to hear a few more tunes. They said they'd send a cab for Patton if he'd come. Another college kid with Patton decided he was Patton's manager. They went to the bawdy house and Patton started playing polkas. He made \$60 playing, which allowed them to pay off their bill at the Parson's Hotel and get out of town.

The man who used to own Samson's Hardware had 2 Ford pickups on the train. The boys put their stuff in them and got inside the trucks and watched the scenery go by that way. They stopped at Curry that night; they thought no one knew they were riding the train. But they did know, and came back and said, "Isn't one of you the harmonica player? The boys at the bunkhouse would like to hear you." So they got to sleep in beds that night, and Patton had to put on a concert for the bunkhouse boys.

The two guys Patton was traveling with got off at Nenana . When the train crossed the bridge at Nenana, it started to get very cold. Patton had no warm clothes. He went over the top of the train to the coal car. When the fireman turned around to get a shovelful of coal and saw this soot-stained kid, he said something to the engineer. The engineer pointed to Patton to slide alongside the boiler and warm up. When they got to Fairbanks, he was allowed to shower in the crew quarters (where the News-Miner is now) and clean up. Then he called Andrew Anderson, who came over and got him. This was January 1932.

Fairbanks in the 1930s: Patton's first job was fixing up Anderson's old automobiles that he'd acquired on bad debts and so forth. Later he was doing plasterwork in a building. He was halfway up the tower when the ladder broke and he fell backwards two stories before he was caught by a 2x12. He broke an artery in his thigh. In those days, your salary stopped if you got hurt. After he got out of the hospital, though, Don Adler had compassion for him, and invited Patton to live under the theater in an apartment for the winter. They did all the office work for the Lathrop Company over at the coalbunker office. For a while, Patton worked for the F. E. Co.; they had a trading post out at Chatanika for a while.

Ladd Field had an important role in the development of Fairbanks. The military needed a cold weather research station for flying planes. The building of this installation was fortuitous because when the Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor, it was pursuit ships from Ladd Field that went to Anchorage and took on the attackers. They were outnumbered 20:1 but did a great job defending themselves. They downed a lot of Japanese Zero fighters before they lost their lives. They were flying Air Cobras. All the young pilots died, which hit the community hard. A lot of streets in Ft. Wainwright are named after them. After that there were only PBYS, "flying coffins" available for a while.

The 4th Ave. Line was closed down by "do-gooders" with the help of the military. Patton was on the jury (1946). Julian Hurley was the defender of the ladies; Harry Erronds was the D. A.; and the judge was Judge Pratt. (Patton's dad said he considered the like a necessary evil back in the gold rush days. It was formerly very well regulated

and inspected.) No one would come and say they'd spent time on the line; it was hard to get "witnesses."

During Ellen Baker's case, Hurley asked for a 10-min. recess before his closing arguments, during which he rushed to the CA Saloon to have a double-shot, and then rushed to Lavery's Store to buy a yellow onion (he put half in each of his coat pockets). When he got back, he stated that it was terrible that law enforcers were peeping toms, trying to besmirch women's reputations, and quote the Bible. Erronds jumped up and said, "He's intimating that the Savior condoned prostitution." All the while, Hurley had been rubbing his eyes with the onion juice and crying as he gave his speech. Pratt struck from the record all the evidence that Erronds had presented, and the jury had nothing left to convict the woman on.

Patton tells about the Tent City, a hotel of tents that tourists stayed in, where Fairbanks Inn is now. Chuck West, Mary Ann Frisky, and Phil Johnson pooled funds to build Tent City. No roads were paved in town at that time, though tours were coming in over the AK Highway. The tents had comfy beds, with washpans and chamber pots.

On one occasion, Patton brought a busload of tourists from Beaver Creek. The dust was boiling on S. Cushman St. Everyone got off and started signing in. One older couple wanted to check it out. They would up giving their tickets back to Frisky and going to the Nordale Hotel. The man gave Patton a \$20 tip for taking them; he was a retired chairman of the board of Chase National Bank.

The summer of 1952 was a very dry season, and fires jumped the Richardson Highway, closing the road, around Black Rapids. These fires were started by lightning. Another fire, between Whitehorse and Haines closed the Alcan Highway also. The railroad kept bringing tourists in. No one was checking out of hotels, however, so extra people were accommodated in private homes, coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce and Eva McGown.

Two priests arrived who had bought the most expensive tour that Arctic AK Travel Service had, calling for a private room with bath for each. There was a miner named Manny Olson who had a deluxe suite in the Nordale Hotel. He was also a Catholic and was out in Seattle at the time. Patton asked Arnie Lee, the manager, if he could bring the priests to Olson's room. As Patton was counting the tickets, he heard the priests giving Jim Hood, the desk clerk, a hard time about their accommodations. Hood said, "Talk to Patton."

They told Patton they weren't satisfied with the arrangement. Patton told them most people were being put up in private homes and told about a couple 2,000 years ago called Joe and Mary, who shared their accommodations with barnyard animals. The priests said they'd never complain again and went upstairs.

Patton says he has a severe lung disease and can't stay in AK during the winter anymore. He mentions that when Cap Lathrop built KFAR, his friend was Fred Waring, who had "The Pennsylvanians." Waring made a recording of the AK Flag Song, but didn't think it was perfect, so he gave it to Cap, who used to use it to sign on and off the radio with. Patton would love to have a copy of that recording.

Patton's granddaughter is getting married this weekend.