

## Summary for H87-82-10

Woodrow Johansen is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 1/4/85

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Gayle Maloy interviews Woodrow "Woody" Johansen in Fairbanks, AK on 1/4/85. Johansen was on the show last month it appears. He told a fascinating "birdcage name" story.

Johansen's grandfather, Adam Block, came to AK in 1867. He was a sergeant in the Union Army at the time AK was purchased from Russia. His outfit was sent to AK before the transfer ceremony in Sitka. He stayed in the territory after that, and wound up in Seldovia, owning a store and running a post office. Johansen never knew him personally.

Johansen is quite a historian of AK. He says the acquisition of books on AK is an expensive undertaking, and something his wife has sometimes regretted getting him started in. About 1944 or 1945, Dave Adler had a fire in his bookshop on Cushman, so he had a fire sale. It was around Johansen's birthday, so his wife went and picked him up Wickersham's Trails, Trials, and (can't remember). In it, Wickersham mentions so many other parts of AK history that Johansen just kept acquiring books after that. He found mention of his own family when he read up on AK history, too.

In Cordova, they got mail once a week, when the AK Steamship Co. came in. Johansen came to college in Fairbanks as a student in 1933, and he had a job to work his way through. He was a butcher, helping the cook in the kitchen. He arrived on the train in the first week of September and was at work the day after. Another part of his job was to provide the vegetables. He was digging potatoes out of 4 inches of snow on September 6, he recalls. Dr. Bunnell had planted this potato garden just south of the Eielson Building. He dug potatoes, carrots, and turnips.

He left the university in 1935 and went back to Cordova, mainly due to lack of funds. He returned to Fairbanks in 1937, after working the summer for Dr. Patty and Bruce Thomas on Coal Creek on the Yukon. He worked there until he graduated. He was a point-driver. For 2 years he worked as a point-driver here, then he was promoted to point doctor on Woodchopper Creek.

In order for dredges to work ground, it has to be thawed. A point-driver drives a 3/4-inch pipe into the ground to the bedrock, and cold water flows through the pipe to thaw the ground. Points were placed in triangle shapes, points about 12 feet apart. Depending on the ground, it might take 3 weeks to several months to thaw. Point driving consisted of a weight fitted onto the pipe, and an "anvil" clamped onto the pipe. The driver had to hammer the anvil, and turn the pipe into the ground.

When they started the job, sometimes they'd wake up and not be able to open their hands, after pounding. After a couple weeks, though, they toughened up. They'd work 10 hours a day, every day of the week. Most mines did. Johansen says a lot of the college students used to work in the mines.

Sixty-three cents an hour was the going wage, the same as the Fairbanks Exploration Co. was paying. In 1938 they heard that the F.E. workers were negotiating for a 10-cent raise in pay. Soon miners working for F. E. Co. were making 73 cents/hour. The guys working on Coal Creek approached Dean Patty for a raise. Johansen was one

of three who approached him. He was very nice about it, but said he simply could not afford it. He said in June he might be able to. June came and went with no raise.

In late June there was a cloudburst and it started washing out hydraulic lines, point fields, and dredge pond. Patty wanted the men to go out and save what they could. The men said, "Sorry, we can't do that until we get 73 cents/hour." They got the raise; however, some who'd been active in the group didn't have a job the following summer.

Coal Creek is northeast of Fairbanks. It's 80 or 90 miles up the Yukon River from Circle City. It's one of several creeks coming in on the left limit of the Yukon River. Most of the freight for mines as far as Rampart came through Whitehorse. Students returning to school would rent a rowboat and drift down the Yukon to Circle City, which took about a day. In Circle they'd catch Johnny's Palm's "stage," a flatbed truck that hauled freight from Whitehorse to Fairbanks.

The students would ride on top of Palm's load. One time they offered to help him unload in Fairbanks, and they uncovered the freight to discover they'd been riding on a load of caskets (coffins). A lot of freight was brought through Canada to Fairbanks.

When Johansen came to UAF, he met other students going there for the first time, too, some of who became his lifelong friends. Bill Cashen, born and raised in Douglas, and Cashen's close friend Harry Lundell, who still resides in Fairbanks, are two examples. There were students from most towns on the coast. Earl Fosse was from Ketchikan and later became Cashen's roommate. George Karavelnikoff and Oley Kookalah were from Juneau. Seven came from Cordova that year.

Bill Cashin was Johansen's closest friend, a crazy Irishman who'd tell stories all day. He was also a very bright young man. Harry Lundell's job was to haul coal from the railroad to the power plant. Cashen's job was driver for the president of the university; he drove around in a beautiful Buick sedan, while the other guys had more taxing positions.

Cashen was an exceptional writer and edited the UAF newspaper for years. He also wrote a book on Bunnell: Farthest North College President. When he graduated he went to Anchorage as a teacher. At the beginning of the war, he was asked to teach at the university in Fairbanks. Johansen was asked, too. Cashen convinced him to come. (Johansen's other option was a position in Tok, building the AK Highway, but it gets down to -50 and -60 there, so it wasn't too hard for him to choose.)

Backtracking a bit, Johansen talks about the university under Dr. Bunnell. There was a men's dorm, a women's dorm, and the Administration Building, which contained the library, powerhouse, and gym. The basement of the old gymnasium and one section of the Eielson Building were also built. There were also a few faculty houses on campus.

Dr. Bunnell felt that the life each student led was his personal responsibility. He knew many students' families. The dining hall was in the basement of the women's dorm. Twice a week, Bunnell required men to wear coat and tie and one girl was assigned to sit at each table. Bunnell sat in the corner and ate also. Every Sunday during the winter, Bunnell would give the same speech, that the college could not heat all of AK, and to please keep windows closed and turn off unnecessary lights.

One time, Johansen wanted to go to Anchorage to the Fur Rendezvous. He asked Bunnell if he could go. After considerable discussion Bunnell consented. Then he asked Johansen what he'd do if he found a package with a quart of whisky in with the parcels delivered, if he was the president. Johansen said he didn't know. Bunnell said it

happened to him. He called the recipient down and gave it to her personally, so that no one else would see it, to protect the other students (?).

The woman Johansen later married, Carolyn, was at UAF at this time. They met for the first time when he was a janitor in the Main Building. They talked, and started dating. They continued dating until she graduated, when they married, in 1942. She worked in Anchorage for the railroad. They came to Fairbanks when Johansen started teaching here. They've lived here ever since, except 2 years in Valdez when Johansen was working for the AK Road Commission there.

Carolyn Haggstrom was born and raised in Nenana. Her father was an engineer on the AK Railroad, and later owned a trading post in Nenana. He was called Carl Haggstrom. When Carolyn was a student in Nenana High School, she came to Fairbanks during Winter Carnival as Miss Nenana. She was also later Miss University at UAF. Johansen was kind of proud of that. He still thinks she's a very attractive woman.

Johansen spent 27 years with the AK Road Commission. He went to work for them first in 1951. It was a federal agency at that time. In 1956, the feds decided the Bureau of Public Lands could handle the work. With statehood in 1958, the state was not ready to run the highway department, so the Bureau continued to run it until 1960, at which time the AK Dept. of Highways was created. It was the same work with the same people, however. In 1975, the Dept. of Highways became the Dept. of Transportation and Public Facilities, as it is today.

When Johansen began there, no contract work was done. The first contracted bridge in Interior AK is the one over Noyes Slough on Illinois St. (1951). The following year the bridge over Noyes Slough on Minnie St. was built. Prior to that, to get from the Graehl area to Slaterville there was a suspension bridge that you had to walk over. This swinging bridge was only for pedestrians.

The first paving job on a highway in Fairbanks was College Road. Johansen talks about the red tape he ran into in making out estimates for contracted work.

One of the projects that's close to his heart: When oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay, many contractors wanted to get equipment up to the location—hence the idea to build a winter road. The idea was they'd contract work out. They ran into so many problems working up contracts, though, that Johansen was told that the commission was to build the road from Livengood to the Yukon River, which would give them time to hire someone to do the rest (this was in November of 1968). They had no equipment for that type of operation. So they had to assemble trailers, a mobile generating plant, a cookhouse, etc.

They built the road from Livengood up to Mike Hess Creek, then down this creek to the Yukon River. In the meantime, men went to Stevens Village to hire as many natives as wanted to work to build the ice bridge across the Yukon, hoping it'd be done by the time the road builders got there. Johansen talks about the ice bridge.

They reached the Yukon about a week before Christmas. They said, "Should we disband?" and they were told they had to build the road to Sagwon. The temperature was -60 to -70. Kerosene froze, diesel wouldn't run. They couldn't move the operation, and had to rent equipment. The commissioner in Juneau said, "If you're not moving by Monday, we're shutting you down." Then the weather warmed up; the governor called and said to shut it down anyway, but Johansen didn't have radios to his crews, so they

kept going—to Bettles and up the John River to Anaktuvak, to Sagwon. The beds were never cold because the men slept in rotations.

Maloy talks about Mt. McKinley Bank and how they decided to sponsor Meet a Pioneer based on listening to last week's interview with Johansen. He and his wife, as well as their four children, live in Fairbanks at present.