

## **Summary for H87-82-24**

### **Paul Griemann is interviewed by Gayle Maloy in Fairbanks, Alaska on 5/24/85**

Gayle Maloy interviews Paul Griemann, Sr., in Fairbanks, AK on 5/24/85. He's best known for his work in transportation in interior AK.

Griemann has been in Fairbanks 63 years. On Sept. 1, 1923 at 10:00 they stopped at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Cushman St. The first person he talked to was W.F. Thompson, because they saw a sign in the window of Pete Steele's Grocery Store that said, "Cabins for Rent." W.F. Thompson looked over his glasses at them while he talked. He wrote an article about them; Griemann wishes he'd kept it. They started out from Chicago July 6, and arrived Sept. 1. In those days, newcomers to Fairbanks stuck out like a sore thumb.

He was born February 2, 1902 in Hookdale, IL, a farming village. It was a German community. Prior to WWI, everything was in German there, like church services, etc. Only one "Yankee" family lived in the area, the Bates, who had 8 or 9 children. Griemann's grandfather had come over from Germany.

Griemann left home when he was 16. He had a disagreement with his father over tractors. Griemann suggested selling the horses and feed and buying a tractor. His dad wanted to stay with horses.

Johnny Tomrick, since deceased, and his brother Henry, Griemann's brother, and Griemann are the only ones left of "that generation." Johnny and Griemann teamed up; the Tomrick farm had a tractor on it.

Griemann went to his uncle's, and worked for the C, B, & Q Railroad for 2 months on a coal chute. Everything in those days was coal-fired. He helped his uncle harvest crops in the fall, and returned home.

A week later his cousin Henry Girding was going north, near Decatur, to shuck corn. Griemann went with him and got a job on a farm with the Baileys and shucked corn for 2 months. There were lots of Bailey families in that area. He made about \$250. He returned home after this, and helped his brother-in-law's father with his dairy farm (the Kleiner Farm). Kleiner's grandfather, Kaiser, had been the first to process condensed cream.

Two or three years later he got \$25 together to register at a mechanic school, and then gathered the money to rent an apartment in Chicago, \$12/month. The streetcar cost 6 cents each way, so he didn't use the streetcar, in order to save money. He usually cooked for himself, but sometimes went out and had a Smith's Cafeteria dinner. A T-bone steak with all the trimmings could be had for 35 cents in those days.

Griemann was about 18 when he went to Ray Automobile School. It was supposed to be a 6-week course, but Griemann spent over a year there, and learned all facets of mechanic work, as well as building batteries and acetylene welding. This was required knowledge, especially when you got out into remote areas.

At the school, he met Mr. Pearl, a secret service man for the Illinois Central Railroad. Through him he got a job with the railroad. He worked there for 3 years, at \$5.50/day.

Griemann bought a used Model T Ford for \$125 and overhauled it. He and Mr. Pearl drove it all the way to AK. He traces their route through the states. When they left for Seattle, Griemann had two destinations in mind: Buenos Aires, Argentina, or

Fairbanks, AK. His mother pleaded with him to choose Fairbanks. He had a lot of information on Fairbanks from the Department of the Interior.

The only paved roads on their trip were 1 mile out of Denver, CO. All other roads were dirt. From Valdez to Fairbanks was a "renovated dog trail." That road was mainly traversed by horse teams.

They packed gas with them from Valdez. Tiekel was the next place to get gas, and then Copper Center. The gas they got along the Richardson was in crates—there was no such thing as bulk gas then. John Butrovich and Frank Young would remember this, says Griemann. Lavery and Bailey Store and Standard Garage were the first two bulk gas stations in Fairbanks.

In the fall of 1923, Griemann worked for the N.C. Co. There he met Paul Rickert. He did some repair work for Rickert, who later asked him to run his thrashing machine. Griemann didn't want to quit on the N.C. Co. Bill Hunter, the foreman of the shop, overheard, however, and said, "Remember we shut this shop down the 15th of October. So if you find something that pays more and lasts longer I'd advise you to take it."

Griemann terminated with the N.C. and overhauled the gas engine and thrashed Paul J. Rickert's grain, and thrashed grain all along Farmer's Loop Rd., which was all farms. He says everything that was needed was grown here and the whole town was self-sufficient in those days. There was even a flourmill in Fairbanks.

That's how Griemann became known as a mechanic. Roy Ferguson asked him to overhaul his Dodge car, and through him, Bob Sheldon heard about him. Sheldon invited him to lunch, where he said he and Gallen were going to start a transportation and tourist business in McKinley Park, and he wanted to get rid of his repair shop and equipment. He said he'd sell it all to Griemann for \$400. That's how Griemann got started in the repair business.

Griemann rented the building for \$15/month. He had more business than he could take care of. George Butrovich said he'd work for nothing just to learn the trade. Griemann didn't want him to work for free; he showed him what he knew for two seasons. After that, Butrovich got a job with the AK Road Commission, and achieved a foreman of shop position. Later Butrovich went to college, and worked for Douglas Aircraft Corp.

After they moved to Lacey between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, a friend, Mr. Groves, who had the Oldsmobile Agency, said he wanted to get rid of it. So he did, and invested money in Griemann's business. Griemann took on the Oldsmobile and Pontiac dealerships, as well as the General Motors Truck agency. James Pearl, who Griemann called Dad, since he was so much older, was also still involved with Griemann's enterprise.

In 1927 the dealership was put together. The customers would look at pictures and order a car from the dealer, who'd send for it from the factory. Griemann sold 5 or 6 cars and 2 trucks during that time, one to the Pioneer, and the other to Sourdough Express. Ernie Schermer was running the Pioneer then.

A Buick 4-door Sedan with chrome wire wheels (6 wheels, 4 plus 1 in each fender) cost \$1,845. The buyer paid him in \$20 bills. He was a bootlegger over in the Circle country, Griemann found out later.

Every so often they'd put an ad in the News-Miner. When Cap Lathrop started KFAR, they'd put a commercial on there, too.

The F. E. Co. started out across the street from Griemann. They gave him all their business until they built their own shop on Garden Island, where Golden Valley Electric now has their plant and offices. So Griemann got rich quite fast, and in January of 1929 he was invited by GM and Oldsmobile to a dealers convention in Lansing, MI. He met sales manager D.S. Eddins, and was taken to Pontiac where he met president of GM Stewart Seaton, who later became Secretary of the Interior. They were also reacquainted in Fairbanks, when Seaton visited during the dedication of the bridge, when Griemann was president of Pioneers of Alaska.

On his trip to the states, Griemann visited his family, and went to a dance in Hookdale, IL, which turned out to be a surprise birthday party for him. He knew a girl named Flora since childhood, and told his sister and brother-in-law to bring her to the dance, and he'd take her home. Two weeks later they got married, and a few days later they started back to Fairbanks. Flora had had her eye on him.

They took the rail to Seattle, and took the AK Steamship up, but got shipwrecked in the Wrangell Narrows, and returned to Seattle, where they were put up for 2 days. They took a new steamer to Seward, and then took the rail to Curry, where there was a terrific snowstorm. They couldn't get out for 5 days, but the railroad fed them and they had a good time.

Within 6 months of returning Griemann was having disagreements with Mr. Pearl. He finally said, "Either you buy me out or I'll buy you out; you decide. I'm not going to argue with you any more." He said Griemann better buy him out. So he became the sole owner of the Standard Garage Co.

Leonard Seppala and his wife and Mr. Henderson and his wife were some of Griemann's customers and friends. Griemann and Maloy talk about a picture at 8<sup>th</sup> and Bonifield, which was out in "the country" at that time. Griemann bought the lot—109 feet wide and 210 feet long, for 10 cords of wood (roughly \$100).

Griemann was short on money when he started building there, and he went to the bank but they wouldn't loan him \$100. So a man across the street loaned it to him. There wasn't really a banking system in Fairbanks—there was one bank, and it wasn't until Cap Lathrop opened the second bank that there was some competition.

Griemann later started a bus line from downtown to the college. He had 5 kids, and his wife worked in the business with him. This transportation business led them into the tourist business. During WWII, they served Ladd Field and Eielson; they were continually taking loans out of Seattle First National Bank, because they still couldn't get big loans in Fairbanks. They needed them, though, to order new equipment and expand the business as quickly as possible.