

NARRATOR: REUBEN CALL

July 28, 1981

INTERVIEWER: PETER CRAIG

Diamond Ridge, Homer, Ak.

P: This is Peter Craig interviewing Reuben Call on July 28, 1981 in his home on Diamond Ridge. Well, Reuben, first thing I was just going to ask you, what was homesteading like? And what the Homer area was like when you came to Homer, and how has it changed since you came?

R: Okay, I came to Homer first in 1951. Stanley Woodman and his wife had a tractor, and they took me around, and showing me land in different places, got me acquainted with some of the different people, and they even took me up to Olsen Mountain to show me what land was available. Well, after I looked around up there, I decided it was just too far from town. And I wasn't interested in it at all. Later on, I went up there next to Ninilchik and other places. I looked at land around several different times. But I wanted something I could enjoy.

In 1952, Cecil Wyatt (?) had homesteaded on Diamond Ridge, and he told me one day that the 160 acres adjoining his land was available. This was in the summer of 1952, so I went to Anchorage to file on it. I found that a man had filed ahead of me, by fifteen days. But then I checked with him later, and his wife didn't want to live on it. And then he relinquished to me.

Well, this land had been homesteaded prior to my time. At least people had lived on it hoping to fulfil the requirement of homesteading, but had never succeeded. Sam Gusperic (?), way back in 1938 had lived with a fellow, oh about a third of a mile lower where my present cabin is, and there they built a log cabin. Then in the late '40's a couple had lived in that cabin hoping to fulfil the requirements of homesteading. That didn't succeed then, when this man filed just ahead of me and his wife didn't live on it, - that left it open. So I was the fourth person who had lived on the land for a period of time or considered it..

Well, Mr. Lofgren was beside me. His land bordered me on forty acres. And he had a fence that come up to my land in which he had cattle. He had tried to run his farm with cattle that didn't work very well. He worked with seed potatoes, and then he had a lot of chickens, hens and so he made his living.. He and his wife and two children and Laura Barton is the only surviving member of those four. They managed to provide a living for themselves off the homestead without working outside for a different income.

Sam Gusperic (?) who lived beside me on eighty acres, his land adjoined me on eighty acres on the other side. He worked for the Homer Electric Association for a number of years. A Mr. Campbell, who lived farther over, had a homestead and had animals there at times, but in order to make a living, he worked in different places in canneries during the summer.

R. Farther east a Mr. Munroa had sheep, he had got the big home that is now the Homestead Homer, over there pretty well built, and he worked on the place, running his sawmill, using his tractor, and the sheep, but he didn't make a very good living, his wife, meanwhile was working for the federal government and between the two of them, they kept things going. Mr Templeton lives where Dave Ford lives now, but he worked for the Homer Electric. It seemed if almost everybody who had a place to work out in order to keep going on the homestead. I was not here early enough to get connected with the telephone lines. In the early days Mrs. Walli had a connection in her store, so people that wanted to talk to certain people could call her and she'd plug in or connected, and so people could talk with one another through out Homer. It seemed to work good, I bought one of those telephones expecting to hook it up some time, but I never did, so I told the man if I never came after the telephone, don't worry about it, it's my responsibility to pick it up if I wanted it. And I never did, so I have never seen it since. That was Mr. Hegdell(?) I think it was that had a little store and a theatre at the location of the present Methodist Church. And later gone the Methodist Church bought that property. The original---well, the original Methodist Parsonage is where Wayne Jones is living. And---then when he bought this place that---the present location they have a---they had a place to build a parsonage.

Well, I've never cut any standing live trees, in order to take wood out of it or to sell for logs. A lot of the logs on my place should be cut. The trees are getting old, and the lumber is going by. A lot of the trees are just getting to old. But so far, I've just preferred to leave them, and then if somebody else wanted to cut it for lumber they could do that. A few years ago I had a fellow come with a government rotatiller--an enormous machine that could run over Alder brush bigger than that. It was ten feet high. It could just run over it and chop it all up.

P: Bigger than this mug here?

R: Yea, Bigger than that. I think it was up to 3 or 4 inches, that's about 3. He went over 5 or 6 acres of mine and I paid him for it. Then later on I had another fellow rotatill the some soil and seed it. So far I haven't disturbed more than six or seven acres of all my 160 acres. Wondering for sure what to do with it. I feel real concerned for the land. This year I thought I was going to seed down two or three acres to hay, but so far I haven't got to it because the man who had planned to do it says he's too busy to do it.

I raise potatoes here. I raise them because I like to raise potatoes. Back in Massachusetts I asked to---Oh, I raised potatoes on two acres one year and I got, oh, I got a tremendous yield off of them. And there I had equipment to plant them and for digging them. Here I do it all by hand by myself usually. Once in a while some body will help me pick up the potatoes, but I sort of enjoyed doing things the hard way. The last two years, strange as it may seem, soon after I've planted my potatoes, the ravens have come over from the dump, which is about a mile and a half away. In plain view of here. And they have pulled up a lot of the potatoes. Last year they pulled up more than half of them, this year they've probaly pulled about 40 % of them.

In fact for a long time I didn't think I was going to have any potatoes this year. There doing very well, later on I will show them to you outside. There looking mighty good. There not looking as good as your father's, Peter. But mine would have looked a lot better. If I didn't have company this year, and I had taken my potatoes and sprouted them before I planted them, they would probably be two, three weeks ahead of where they are now. But they're doing real well, and I will get a good crop.

My....A few years ago I was wondering what to do with some of my land near by and I thought perhaps rhubarb is so easy to plant. I went up to the neighbors here and I get plants. You know abandoned homesteads, why nobody was using them- just little short plants that had stop growing. Hadn't been fertilized or on good land. Then I eventually got about, oh, I got over 100 plants. Then I sorted them out and split them up. Now over several years, I have 250 plants. Well, I enjoy fooling with them and giving some people some of the rhubarb and selling the rest.

Pretty quick I will start canning. Last year I canned five dozen quarts in one day, and five dozen pints. Then another day I made about twenty quarts of juice. This year, I will probably can jelly that much and give well over half of it away. In fact, I'll let you see how good it tastes because it's.... I am surprised how simple it is to make rhubarb. And to make it taste real good. It's almost no work. You just have to pour out a little and see how you like it. (Referring to rhubarb) No, that's fresh I opened it a day or two ago. You'll probably eat a lot of it, in fact, it won't surprise me if you finish the whole thing.

Well, rhubarb is something to make wonderful pies, wonderful cakes and it's so easy to raise. And yet some people don't even ~~touch~~ it. Isn't that a delight?  
touch

P: Oh! Yes.

R: The thing is I enjoy it and almost everybody that comes here likes it to, even if they have never liked rhubarb before. All you have to do with rhubarb is to take off the leaves and pull the stems, clean the stems off, wash them a little bit, the bottom of the stem. And then cut it up into pieces about an inch long, slosh it around in water and drain the dirty water off. Then put it into kettles and cook it without water, just slowly. I have no interest myself, in alcoholic drinks, but a good friend of mine come here a few days ago and got a bunch of rhubarb and is going to make rhubarb wine- which a lot of folks think is real good. In fact, I was told I could have a bottle of it if I wanted it, and I told them I would be happier not to have it. Well at any rate, perhaps you can see what I mean by rhubarb is a good food. Most people never realize how good rhubarb sauce is. And folks say it makes wonderful pies. Well, I tell people I don't think you have to put strawberries with it, I think rhubarb is good by itself. I had one good friend, if I gave her one good quart of rhubarb she's apt to just eat it all and not give any to her husband. She just loves it that well. Somebody that you know well too.

Well, let's see, now, after I came to my homestead. Well, let's see, in 1951 after I got well acquainted with Stanley Woodman and his wife, I kept coming over here from Seward. And then some time ~~around~~ <sup>about</sup> Christmas time, I bought his Ford tractor. →

and his, he had a small coal trailer on the back and then when I moved on to my homestead...You see, on a homestead, you had one year after you had filed in which during that year you had to live on the land seven months. Well, after I had filed on this land in February, 1953. I had to figure that some time between then and February 1954 I had to actually sleep here, live here for a year or for seven months. Well there was seven months and one day left when I started in with my tractor, coming down the same road that you come today, Peter, along this flat, before you come down this little hill.

You get almost 100 feet of the cabin before you come on to my land. My land doesn't go very far up this little road. I'm at the very top of my <sup>half</sup> mile square all most at the apex. I will show you my well later. And that's only about forty feet from the line. Well, I come across the flat with my tractor at night, and I had my headlights on and the grass was so tall I couldn't see where I was going. I actually had to leave my tractor in the tall grass and find my way down on to this land. And then take my sleeping bag and sleep on the ground. The grass here grows extremely high, and I just didn't know where I was going with the tractor. I had to do it on foot. Well, at any rate, the former man had left a pile of lumber near this pole here. He had had the electricity moved on to the land. The fact that I had moved here and slept on the ground didn't mean that's where I was going to sleep the second night. I took the tractor down to the lower cabin and I slept in that log cabin down there until fall but I decided that was too far from the road and so, in the late fall of '53 I took what lumber was in this pile right here near this pole, and started building this cabin, a man in Homer came up and helped me. And then in the fall, before the snow came, I had a roof on and started living in here.

I went way up the road, a full <sup>quarter</sup> of a mile to get the water for this cabin. Then, in the middle of January, I decided I was going to try to dig a well. And why in January? Well, if the sides freeze, they can't cave in. There's no danger, you know of the sides falling in on you. And each night, the bottom would freeze a little bit, it wouldn't freeze much, but the accumulative cold over night after night would make the sides freeze solid so that they, there ~~was~~ no danger of them. I dug a hole 4 ft. sq. And I kept throwing the dirt out of the hole, ~~4~~ 8 ft. sq. is just the same width that piece of plywood behind you. See, from there it runs over to the middle of the window.

P. Yeah.

R. Then I kept digging it until I got down about 13 ft. throwing the dirt up from way down below. And finally a rock about that big rolled down and hit me on the shoulder and I couldn't dig that way any more. It just almost knocked me out, such a jar. So, from there on I'd fill up the pails and drop a bucket with a hook on it, hook

R. on to the pails and pull them up. I did it myself. <sup>Ten foot</sup> ~~10 ft.~~ down I came to a 7 ft. <sup>well</sup> ~~bed~~ of coal and I used that coal for part of my fuel that winter. And then a few years later, I got some coal boring tools and coal mining tools and blasted some coal out. So I blasted out a second winter's coal out of my well. But it's alot easier to go down to the beach and get it. You'd say, why? Well, part of it is because all of the coal here either above or below is on clay, in clay, and clay is dirty stuff. And the coal that comes off the beach has been washed clean. It's usually hard, so that it's alot nicer to burn coal off the beach than to try to do it here.

Then later on I was working with Gerbits and he had some lumber. And at one time I bought a bunch of it, and then when I had it on hand here, I decided I might as well use it. So I had Ted Jackson come up and we built a guest cabin, 6, 7, 8 years ago. Something like that. I've used it very little, but it's awfully handy. Only three feet away, it just acts as a storage thing. And my neice stayed in it <sup>while</sup> ~~she~~ she was here a few days. I've gotta build me another tool shed sometime, and then I can keep this thing available for guests that if I can get some people to come see me.

a. Well, this year, I plan to go outside in ~~June~~, in Octobver and visit friends and relatives for a month or two. Then when I come back I expect that next year my firemen will be quite alot different. I may try next year to share with somebody in some way, who may want to make use of some of the land. I don't know. I probably will raise more potatoes. I don't expect to be going outside next year. I have five brothers, no I have three brothers and three sisters outside, but normally I wouldn't go outside to visit them unless they were really sick. I wouldn't go outside for just funerals. ~~In our family we've had quite a bit,~~

In our family we've had quite a bit, quite a bit of cancer in the family. And sometimes if a person is terminal, you know - they know within a month or two they're apt to die or they're pretty certain to. Fortunately, in two cases they have just been distressed, they haven't been under pain. They have lived at home. They haven't been under medication. Well, I guess that happened in three cases, At any rate, it's ...

I don't anticipate moving from here for the next ten years or more. I just like it here. As far as trying to do what I can, in regard to. . . trying to help with different things: I'm apt to get in tough with the experimental Station next year and experimant with a bunch of grains and perhaps several varieties of potatoes. You see, I have over a hundred spruce or pine trees over here. I don't know what I will do with those. I'll probably sell some of them. I would like to, I'd like to start a nursery here. You know, trees that are adapted to the area. And that people can afford to buy. It's amazing how expensive trees are, if you go down and buy them from a nursery, a regular nursery.

Reuben Call/Peter Craig (6)

P: Do you have any other jobs?

R: Well, right now, right now I thought I would work out some this summer, helping people with their housing and all. At present I don't have any job except what work I do here, and a concern with, I say, helping other folks at different times.

I used to help Gerbit's (?). I worked for him steady for five summers and sometimes we worked through till Christmas. I don't know. In a way it seems kind of unfortunate that a person as healthy as I am is given so much self-help, I mean help from the government in forms of social security. Most people feel they have to pay rent. Lots of people have to pay for a car. See, I have no bank payments of any kind. I never borrow money from a bank or anybody, and so I don't have to pay it back. I don't have any guns, hardly any luxuries. No camera. I try no to have anything that anybody'd be envious of. You know, like a good piece of machinery, cameras or binoculars or whatever. Oh, t.v., typewriters, so forth, musical instruments, stereos. I just get along without them. This radio I paid twenty dollars for seven or eight years ago. I have to run it on batteries because the transformer won't work, but it still works.

I should, I should at times - and I feel a responsibility to do more for my neighbors. It's a good question you ask me about what I do do. Perhaps next year...

#### Interruption

... and sold his to the man across the road. Cooper, he sold his land. Monroe sold his land. Campos? sold his. Kranich sold his. Nelson brothers have sold about half of theirs. Templeton sold his. The Belknapp's has subdivided his and that sort of is what's happening to the Lofgren homestead. But from my land, Marsh pitzman's brother owns eighty acres here. And then Marsh owns land beyond that. Bob Brant has land up on the hill. And so this area through here at present, between here and Schumann's, you might say most of the way to Schumann's. From this gully down here ~~to~~ almost to Schumann's - it really isn't being cut up very much. In most cases, Campos? is the only ones. Do you know where is?

P: No.

R: Campos is a homestead - you know where Dave Frod lives?

P: No.

R: Bob Brant or any of those people? Which way did you come up, by Sherman? Oh I see? Well, is there anything else you wanted to say?

P: Just thank you for this interview. This is wonderful.

R: Finish it up.