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Name and place: Charles Lazeration interviewed by Margaret Van Cleve

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Margaret introduces the recording with Charles Lazeration who is an old hard rock miner. He has mined in Fairbanks Creek, Stampede, and places like that, but also on Cleary Hill and Pedro Dome.

They are recording at Charles' home at Old Steese Highway, about 5 miles north of Fairbanks. Margaret tells that according to Charles' survey, he is from a mining country, and asks Charles if he had mining experience previous to coming to Fairbanks. Charles tells that he was born in [Unclear], but was born in a coal mining town called 28. That was the number of the local mine. It was between towns called [Unclear] and Jamesville.

[Margaret says something unclear.] Charles says that he was born there. His mother and father had a small farm. His dad was a farmer. He had an excellent [unclear]. Their mother raised the three kids: Charles, his brother, and his sister. At first Charles worked on the farm but later he started hard rock mining. [Unclear talking.]

2:17 There were some people there who had a farm where Charles worked. Then they had a coal mine, and the husband and the son [from the farm] worked there. Charles worked there too.

Then he went to New York City, where he worked for a while, but he didn't like it. [Unclear talking.] Charles worked "there" on small mines. In 1936, he went to St. Michael, Pennsylvania, where he worked for 3 years before coming to Alaska. About a half a mile from the site of the old dam [?] was Jonestown.

There was no work where Charles was born in, and people moved away. That was during the depression. Charles left in 1936, but it was all depression since 1932.

3:59 The one fellow with whom Charles came to Alaska worked with Charles in St. Michael at Redwalk, but he left in 1937.

Margaret asks how Charles came to Alaska, and he tells that they had planned it for 4-5 years. George, one of their partners, left a year before to go west. He had relatives in Montana but he went to work in Idaho. A year after that, Charles' group came to Idaho and they left to Seattle, from where they came to Alaska. Margaret asks if they came with a steamship and Charles tells that they did. They took the steamer Yukon that crossed lots of little towns like Sitka and Juneau. They landed in Seward from where they took the train to Fairbanks. That was a three-day trip those days. [Unclear.]

Margaret asks if jobs were easy to come by those days but Charles tells that they weren't. They were able to get a job here and there. There was an employment agency by a fellow named [Unclear], who was working for the Department of the Interior. Charles and his friends picked up work on holidays. They did wood cutting that didn't pay much, but they lived cheaply too.

6:08 Margaret asks where they stayed and Charles tells that they had a cabin that they rented. It was close to the post office where the railroad station is. Later on, they had a cabin on 2nd [Avenue]. [Margaret says something unclear.] Then they had a cabin at Wickersham [Street]. Margaret asks if that was in spring of 1939, but Charles says that it was in 1938. [Unclear talking.] Their more permanently rented house was on 2nd [Avenue] and Wickersham [Street]. [Unclear talking.]

Margaret asks when he went out mining. Charles tells that they didn't start mining, but worked odd jobs around town. Lowell Morgan, who was the employment agent, told them about jobs whenever he knew of something and so they cut wood and picked up garbage.

8:12 Then in 1939, George went to Kantishna and Charles went to Chena Hot Springs. [Unclear talking.] He was supposed to stay there until July. He went early in the spring when there was still snow on the ground, and after that, he went to the Kantishna too. They went prospecting. Then George got a job from Joe Dalton and Charles left to go to Stampede where he stayed overnight. The following day he caught a plane out of there. Margaret asks if Stampede was in Kantishna district and if Charles ever knew Fanny [Unclear]. He says he knows her and her husband.

A week after he got to town, he got a letter with a job offer from Earl Pilgrim from the Antimony Mine. Charles took the offer. That was in Stampede. [Unclear talking.] Margaret asks if that was similar to gold mining. Charles says that it was hard rock mining and that he [unclear talking] until freeze up. George worked there too. When it froze and there was no more water, it was a nice little tunnel. The tunnel went some 500 feet underground. [Unclear question and an answer].

10:58 Margaret asks if the temperature is constant inside the tunnel, and Charles explains that it depends on the proximity of the entrance and that deeper is warmer. On Cleary Hill, in what was called 600-level, the temperature was about 39 degrees. [Unclear talking.]

Charles tells that they worked there until December and then went to town where he worked odd-jobs during the winter. Maxi Miller was operating [unclear], near where the Miller Apartments is. Then Charles went to work at Cleary Hill on April 1st, 1940. Margaret asks if that was for a particular company and Charles tells that it was for Cleary Hill Mining Company who mined gold. The company is not in operation anymore, and explains the location: When one leaves the summit, there are a bunch of buildings still there on the left hand side.

At that time, there were about 30 men. [Unclear talking.] George went to work there too. Their other partner, the third one of the friends who came from Seattle, [Unclear] came to Seward, turned on his heels, and went back east. He never came back to Alaska. The sad part is that when Charles and his wife went out some 10 years ago, he was in hospital and had what they call a black lung. He passed away while Charles was there.

13:51 Margaret asks what Charles' first job was at Cleary Hill. Charles tells that he went out there, having been hired as a mucker. Mucker shovels ore into slow cars [?] that are to be taken into stamp mill. [Unclear talking.] Gold was \$35 dollars per pound at that time. Charles tells that he worked there for four years, and that last fall he worked in night shift as a night [unclear]. They milled in two shifts for 24 hours a day. The underground miners worked 8 hours, but the millmen worked 12 hour shifts, or 10 hours. [Unclear talking.]

There was a bunkhouse and some people had [unfinished thought, cabins?] and a few people lived there in summertime. When the children were going to school in

winter, the women lived in town with the children while the men worked “out there.” [Unclear talking.] The narrow gauge [railroad] only went to Gilmore [Trail?]. [Unclear talking.] They had a [unclear] run in the mornings. Billy Ruth’s [unclear]. It left in the morning at 5 o’clock and people got there [to Cleary?] close to 7am. They worked 13 days in 2 weeks, having one Sunday off. Later on they worked for 6 days.

16:53 [Unclear talking.] Charles worked night shifts for over 2 years until he went to Thompson and Gilmore Domes where he worked for 3 years. [Unclear talking.]

When the war came, the government shut gold [mining] down, but they made exceptions for a little while when Thompson [unclear]. [Unclear talking.] Thompson sells by the unit. [Unclear talking.] They mined at Gilmore Dome but hauled it to the mill at Cleary. They had to convert it, but they could still use the same stamps from the mill. Then in 1945 they shut down and Charles went into the service at Army Transportation Service, which was later known as Transportation Corps.

19:27 [Unclear question.] Charles says he didn’t go to Ladd Field and that his basic training was in Anchorage. He stayed there until he got the assignment at the Transportation Corps.

In Kodiak, they had a dock about a mile out of town and [unclear]. [Unclear talking.] They were the boarder service and had small boats. Then they had a bunch of barges. When they closed that down, Charles went to Dutch Harbor. [Unclear talking.] He was on a barge where they lived in and [unclear]. They repaired boats.

The army had lots of boating and water transportation equipment, which lots of people don’t know. [Unclear talking.]

21:45 Margaret asks what Charles thought about the weather up there, and he tells that he liked Kodiak, but Dutch Harbor was [unclear]. [Margaret says something unclear.] He helped with some power plants too. [Unclear talking.]

He stayed in Dutch Harbor for the duration of the war – just about 2 years.

23:50 When he got out of service, he went to see his mother Outside and came back. He went to Butte [Creek?]. The man who had been the superintendent at Cleary Hill partnered with Charles and they went prospecting. His partner was Joe [unclear]. [Unclear talking.]

There weren't too many hard rock mines. Placers were more common. They had some drift mining at Chatanika that they did underground, but mostly it was open cut mining. They were seasonal operations that started when water started flowing in the spring and closed down when it froze in fall. Most of the hard rock mines operated a year round, which was why Charles liked them.

The wages weren't anything compared to now. In Anchorage, in a hard rock mine, it was around [unclear], and in Fairbanks it was \$6 and \$7. That was the pay per day. Then [unclear] paid one dollar a day for boarding. They didn't get free room and board. [Unclear talking.]

26:30 Margaret asks about meals and Charles tells that they had breakfast, and in lunch time the miners would come out and have a lunch. In the evening, they had a big meal.

When Charles was working the night shift, he was [unclear] most of the time. They started working underground 11pm and had their lunch outside. [Unclear talking.] They ate lots of meat. In Cleary Hill, they had [unclear] unless they had steak but they still had choices. [Unclear talking.]

Serving game meat would have been against the law. Margaret says that that would have made a dent in the moose population if they could have served it.

28:24 Barn [?] and Charles went prospecting in Ophir District and in Kantishna. Then in 1947, Charles went to work in town, but before that, when he got back from service, he came back from Outside and worked building the Noyes Slough railroad bridge, and one on Trainor Gate. He worked for a construction company. Then in spring he went prospecting in Ophir again. [Unclear talking.] When he came back from there that fall, he worked a bit around town and at Usibelli's mine in Healy. He went there in fall and worked until March of 1948. He left there, and went to the Koyukuk country, to [Unclear] Creek. He worked there that summer and when he returned to town, he went to work for Carrington, who had the

Sampson's Hardware. He was picking up equipment for them. They rented it [the equipment] out or sold and repossessed it.

31:16 That fall, Barn and Charles mined at Pedro Dome. They had a hard rock mine there until 1954. Margaret asks if there is still a little bit of mining going on there. Charles tells that it was the only hard rock mine besides Fort Knox. [Unclear talking.]

Margaret asks if they were working in areas that had been previously mined, and Charles tells that they had been mined by old-timers, but he mined a new area in the same location.

They had a little hard [unclear talking]. Charles worked at the mine by himself and took odd jobs, like from Antimony Mine and in Livengood. Then he did extra work at Mannie Olson's claims since he needed a little help. Nick Kupoff mined on Pedro [Dome] and Charles helped him too besides the work that he did for himself.

They milled their ore at Cleary Hill and leased the stamp mill. [Margaret says something unclear.] Charles tells that they crush the ore to find gold. That's the separation process.

34:11 Charlie met his wife, got married, and they stayed "there" until their kids got too big [and went to school?]. He continued some mining after he got married. [Unclear talking.] They had two houses: a log house he built "ways up there," about a mile from Pedro Dome and [the other one] only about a half a mile from where they had the mining claim.

Then when the kids started school, they started living in town. They couldn't afford having two places, and decided to give up mining. They rented a house on 6th [Avenue] for a long time, and they [had] lived at the mine for 15 years. Charles was mostly away from home at that time.

36:04 When they left "up there," Charles went to work for Alaska Freight Lines. That was around 1956. They were freighting up north with Cats [Caterpillar machines]. The first year they freighted from Circle to Liverpool Bay in Canada. That was by Cats and [unclear]. They had a special small crane built. They plowed

the way with Cats and followed with trucks. Then, about 14 miles from Circle, they assembled the equipment and took them north.

They went by Blow River [?] into McKenzie, Canada, to Point Brant. That was on the DEW-Line [Distant Early Warning system]. They were building the DEW-line and taking the equipment to the construction. [Unclear talking.]

37:58 The following year they went from Eagle to Cambridge Bay which is at the mouth of Copper River in Canada. There are 1,400 miles from Eagle to Coronation Gulf and it took them a long time. Trucks made back and forth trips to Cambridge Bay. There was a DEW-line site every 15 miles. [Unclear talking.]

They had a bunkhouse and they were traveling 24 hours a day. [Unclear talking.] There were places where they broke through the ice, but luckily never lost anything. Ghezzi had special trucks that were built Outside [outside of Alaska, probably in contiguous United States]. They were big, and used for freighting. When the first one broke through the ice, they never took them to the ice again, but went the rest of the way with Cats. Cats didn't have as heavy loads. Each Cat had about 3 sleds – even the bunk house and cook house were on sleds behind the CAT. [Unclear question.] Charles tells that each CAT hauls about 20 tons in average. Some were lighter and some heavier.

41:11 The first year they had to make a trail that was 24 feet wide. [Unclear.] They had 5 cars behind it. Each car was made for [unclear]. The beds were 20 feet wide and 40 feet long, and had very little clearance. Margaret asks if they had to do lots of brush cutting and Charles tells that they did that with a Cat. Then they crossed small rivers [unclear].

[Break in the recording.]

42:25 Charles tells that he freighted that spring and stayed with Alaska Freight Lines because they started to develop a copper mine at McLaren River that is between Paxton and Cantwell. The McLaren Bridge didn't use to be there, but the road was. About 9 miles up that bridge, on McLaren River, was where the Alaska Freight Lines had their copper mine. They were trying to develop it and Charles went to work there for the summer, doing diamond drilling. They did underground prospecting.

That fall, Charles went back to Eagle to do a freighting trip from Eagle. Margaret says that that was the only way they could get things around those days since they didn't have good freight aircrafts.

Charles continues telling that the next year, he went to work up at Barrow. Puget Sound [Unclear] had the contract up there and Charles worked there. Margaret asks if that was at T-3 Island, but Charles thinks that that was a different operation that was run by the Navy. Their operation was near the DEW line site.

44:37 Margaret asks if their site was in Barrow proper, but Charles tells that it was 2 miles out of Barrow. He stayed there and worked out of Barrow in different sites. [Margaret asks something unclear.] Charles tells that he worked at the shop as a mechanic. They didn't have anything to do with the Navy, except that they were there.

Then Charles worked for an exploration service in Fairbanks, and after that, he worked for Jim Dalton who was "up there," and then for different outfits, like a gas field in Barrow. They were drilling gas wells for the camp that was there, the Arctic Exploration Company, who used gas for heat and power while doing Arctic research. That was in the late 1950s, but the wells were there even before Charles worked there.

47:08 Margaret asks how Charles got into Prudhoe Bay exploration. Charles tells that he worked there too, and he worked for an exploration service as well. They had a contract for Colorado Gas and Oil, and they freighted stuff from Barrow to Guvik, Umiak [?]. They used CATs to do that in wintertime. When they drilled a well at Lake Umiak, they moved rigs the first year.

Colorado Gas drilled there and Charles worked on setting up gas rigs. Not long after [unclear], which Charles missed, they came back from Canada, from Coronation Gulf and Cambridge Bay. The Exploration Service had a contract on the peninsula, freighting from Duke Bay to Igligik [sp?], which was across the peninsula. They freighted with CATs and trucks that Ghezzi had built.

49:16 The Exploration Service was three men in town: Jim Dalton, Ted Matthews and Doug Cope. There was also Jim Marsh from Anchorage. They had the contract for freighting. Charles worked for them that summer.

Exploration Service had contracts for drilling wells in the Interior, just 10 miles north of Nulato. They had a freighting contract for that too. Then there was a contract for drilling at Kennecott, which was with Bear Creek Mining Company out of Kobuk. Exploration Service had a contract there for drilling. They had a turn drill with which they drilled through the overburden and to the bedrock, after which took their casing out and put the other company's casing in so they would have a start. They had trouble getting down to the bedrock, so Exploration Service drilled for them.

51:41 Margaret asks if a diamond drill is very hard metal. Charles explains that the drill is a core instead of like a jackhammer. It drills a core so that one can test it. Margaret clarifies that it looks like a round cylinder. Charles says he forgets the size that his company had. They went up to 4 inches, but there are smaller ones too.

They could take no core samples because the bedrock was like gravel, alluvial [?]. When they got down to bedrock, they started the drill. In the alluvial, they usually used turn drills because in the Interior [unclear]. It's not an augur. Margaret says that there are different types [of drills] depending on what needs to be done.

53:15 Charles tells that he worked for the Exploration Service off and on. Then Charles worked for Al Stout who had a mining operation up at Kobuk. They did some work at Dall Creek Field [?] at Kobuk Airfield. One winter he worked there, extending the field so they could land Herks there. They stripped [unclear]. They built a road from Ruby Creek to Kobuk River. That was for the state. They also built [unclear].

Then Charles mined one year at Pedro [Dome] where the monument is, above the monument. Margaret says that it seems he really enjoys gold mining and asks if it's the thrill of finding gold. Charles says it's not as much that as being able to be one's own boss. That's one of the big appeals of gold mining. Margaret talks more about the excitement of gold mining.

Charles says that's one of the reasons to [unclear]. Their Fairview Manor was close to school, and maintenance was very good. They moved "down here" 22 years ago. Margaret says that they have lots of neighbors now. Charles says they didn't have many back then. They had one neighbor who owns property "here," and there was

one “over here.” [Maybe Charles and Margaret are looking at a map?] The trailer court wasn’t there at the time. Margaret says it [the town] has grown in the 26 years she’s been in Fairbanks.

56:50 Margaret asks if Charles still does prospecting, but he tells that he doesn’t. He went to work for Alyeska before they built the pipeline. He also worked for Birch's Construction. They built an airfield to Deadhorse and freighted from 70 miles inland with Cats and trucks. They just had the contract to build the airfield.

Margaret asks if lots of the equipment was taken there by air. Charles says they assembled it there and took it down the river before freeze up. In the in-between times he worked for Birch's Construction, building an airfield in Barrow. Charles also worked in Juneau. They have a 40-mile road out of Juneau, Morsen Knudsen had [the contract for?] 10 miles, and Birch's had the other 10 miles. They had a float plane, and Charles worked there off and on for 2 years. They unloaded everything and built the airfield.

59:24 [Unclear question.] Charles thinks it was the year of the flood in Fairbanks [1967] and they went there in fall. They had to be really careful. [Unclear.] When the wind is right, the ice comes to the shore and then they had to wait for the ice to break up and get out from the shore so they could get on the shore. That didn’t give them too much time to unload. Equipment for the airfield came by barges.

Birch's had the contract there, putting in platforms for drilling rigs. Charles was on that too. [Margaret asks something unclear about Prudhoe Bay.] Charles tells that he was at Prudhoe Bay good many years before that. Colorado Gas and Oil set up at Aglupik [sp?]. The oil companies had already prospected there years ago, so the initial ground work had been done. They were all over the Arctic in the wintertime. There were companies in there for 4-5 years before the oil was discovered. Colorado Gas and Oil was drilling there, for one.

1:01:41 Margaret tells that it was in 1968 when they made the headlines. Charles tells that Colorado Gas and Oil drilled there before that, outside of the preserve. Colville River is a kind of a boundary and areas east of that were open. Margaret says it was the Naval Reserve, and Charles says that the Naval Reserve was the West side of [unclear] and east side of the river was open.

They put the air field in and built platforms in the Arctic in 1969. Margaret asks if Charles flew up to Deadhorse and worked there. Charles explains that they went into the field. The oil company was Saint Claire and they had their own air field in the place where they made the discovery. Deadhorse was south of there. The first airfield they put in was temporary. [Unclear talking.]

1:03:33 Deadhorse was first known as Crazyhorse. Margaret says she always thought Deadhorse was a strange name. Charles tells that there are different remarks on how Deadhorse got its name but the real reason for the name is that there was Burgess Constructions who bought out Deadhorse Haulers. Deadhorse Haulers took up trucks to build the airfield. [Unclear], so at first it was called Crazy Horse.

They had a radio there, with which they called town [unclear] but they used that [Crazyhorse] callers. Later on [unclear] because they had another company, Spruce Equipment [unclear] and they used that too. Both Burgess, and the other company were based in Fairbanks. [Margaret says something unclear.] Charles tells it was up in Fairbanks.

1:05:13 At first they would go up [unclear] because it was summertime and they were putting the outfit together. Later on, they flew stuff into Deadhorse instead of [unclear]. They got the airfield built and could fly stuff in there with Herks. The airfield was gravel, but it was big.

Margaret says it must have been an adventure to see thousands of people [unclear]. Charles says it was an adventure in a way that it was hard to get supplies in before they built the airfields. Then they freighted from Fairbanks in wintertime via Hickel Highway.

Margaret says it was quite an engineering feat to put in the facilities to connect the Interior by road. Then Margaret asks if Charles continued working in the area after building the airstrip and working for Burgess. He says he did. He worked for Alyeska when they were surveying material sites, before they put the pipeline in. They had Cats [unclear] and snow rigs. That was where the pipeline is now, around Galbreth Lake and Franklin Bluffs. They were surveying material sites for the Dalton Highway that was to run besides the pipeline. They went in when Adagen Pass was built and built a camp there. That was by a company whose name Charles

doesn't remember. When it was shut down, Charles went to open it up again. Charles mentions Happy Valley.

1:08:52 Charles was in town when "they" started moving equipment "in here," and started working for Greeney [sp?] in heavy construction. They had a contract at Delta at [Unclear] Sourdough. They built that end of the pipeline. There were different outfits building the pipeline, but they had that section. When they moved their stuff "here," [unclear]. They moved the pipeline equipment by the pipeline. [Unclear.] They had equipment there at Delta and then they moved stuff over the high way near where the suspension bridge is that goes through the Tanana River. It was a big camp.

From there Charles went to Isabel Pass. [Margaret says something unclear.] Charles worked as an equipment foreman there and all the time his family stayed in Fairbanks.

1:11:11 Charles got his legs broke on Isabel Pass. He was a foreman from there to the camp at Sourdough. They used big trucks to haul material for the road. He was taking a [unclear] frame off a Cat and got caught. Margaret asks if there were quite a few accidents involved in the construction.

Charles says that he doesn't know how many people he had there, but that it might have been close to 2,000. That was one of the larger camps. There were anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 men. Margaret asks if the camp was dismantled after the completion of the work, but Charles says that it wasn't dismantled. The equipment was out there and someone wanted to buy the remaining buildings.

1:12:48 Galbreth Lake and Adagen Pass were all recaps. Before they built the road, Charles worked at Livengood and hauled to the river. They had a contract to build the road to Alyeska. Margaret says it took about 2-3 years to build that road. Charles says it took about 2 years at the most. That summer they went clear to Whitecombe to Yukon River where they built the bridge.

Margaret asks if he has been to the road in recent years, and when he says he hasn't, Margaret tells that it's pretty rough after the winter before they get it graded. Charles says that that winter was a cold one. They were going from the Livengood to the River and it was cold. They had built their camp twice, and there

were some 250 men who set it up. Charles was moving the camps before they were set up so they could move ahead. They were set up just a little bit out of Livengood and they started moving it towards next camp.

1:14:40 Charles explains that they moved ahead of the section and set up a camp. It was tough because they had a certain area of a trail that they had to stay on and that's where the road was built. They did one trip per day so they could move three buildings per day, about 24 miles away. They had house trailers that were 70 feet long, like ATCO trailers. They had a special dolly with which they could take wheels off and make them into flatbeds. The Cats would pull the trailers because there were no roads but just the trail.

They stayed in the new camps until it was time to move again. Charles said they had to set up a disposal area for waste and the waste was treated on the site. They had to set up heat at their camps and haul water. They got drinking water from local creeks and then treated it. In Juneau, they were near a stream with beautiful water, but the State requires them to treat it.

1:17:58 Margaret asks what work experience Charles enjoyed the most. Charles says he enjoyed the varying jobs and that he wasn't tied to one job. He liked being a mechanic and a foreman. He enjoyed the variety. He could have had a desk job but he is not made for it, and he never liked signing checks for anyone.

Margaret thanks for the interview.

[End of the recording.]