

H97-175-04
Dan Naaman

An unknown interviewer talks with Dan Naaman

Dan said his name was Dominic A., but everyone calls him Dan. He was born in Philadelphia in 1883. He attended school in Pennsylvania and graduated in 1904. He intended to just visit his uncle in Fairbanks in 1904. His uncle was a fire chief in town. Fairbanks was an active place at that time. It was growing rapidly. There was no planning and no paved streets.

He returned to Alaska in 1908. He worked for the NC Company on the Yukon River boats from 1908-1913. His old boss, Wally Richand, Sr. reorganized the company. He worked as chief steward and every job they had. He worked with Captain Arlon J. Newcomb was on the Susie. Captain John Cairn was on the Saint Michael. There were two captains named Green – Tom and Jack. He worked on the steamer Swatka. In 1910 he started working on the Susie as the chief steward. Ralph Newcomb was one of the pilots. He has lost track of these men. He talked about navigating the rivers. The Susie was one of the first wood burner. There was a wood camp every few miles. All the passengers and crew would load the wood on the ship. He earned fifty dollars a month as a night watchman. From 1909-1912 he stayed in Alaska. He was in charge of the mess house in 1910-1911. Many of the crew came back from year to year with very few changes. A good many of them had nicknames. Joe Matthews was a chief engineer for the boats and did a lot of pioneering work in Alaska. Dan staked out at Ruby and in Marshall in 1912. Nothing came from his claims. Ralph Newcomb also staked in Marshall.

The interviewer asked if he knew anything about the history of the first hotels in Fairbanks. Tony Madra had the first hotel on the riverbank in Fairbanks. That hotel burned down in 1913 and they built a new place. He didn't see the hotel until 1935 when he returned as a salesman.

He talked about some of the people involved with the NC Company. Wally Richand was vice-president and his immediate boss. Taylor worked for the company. Charlie Brim was the auditor. Everyone was served the same food on the boats. He told a story about a woman who came in on the boat expecting to meet her husband. It turned out that he had left town. She ended up marrying one of the NC agents from Nulato. Dan talked about Judge Flynn from St. Michael. Judge Flynn had worked for the North America Trade and Transportation Company.

Dan said he worked on the ocean steamers for a while. He left that work in 1930. He worked as a salesman.

The interviewer asked about the town of Chena. Dan said they didn't stop at Chena. His boats went from St. Michaels to Dawson. He only made a few trips into Fairbanks and they didn't stop at Chena. Nenana was a regular stop for the boat named the Tanana which Captain Gray ran. Nenana had about 1500 people. It wasn't as large as Fairbanks. There was a lot of prospecting in the area. They also stopped at Manley Hot Springs. They went as far as Tanacross. There was a trader at Tetlin who transported his own merchandise from Nenana.

The interviewer asked about any problems on the trips. One of the marshals from Fairbanks was travelling on the steamer Tanana with a corpse and a few criminals. When they boarded the Susie he started up a poker game and they had it right on top of the corpse.

Dan talked about Fred Cotter who was the mayor of Fairbanks. Mr. Fowl was a customer of Dan's. Mr. Fowl would take merchandise around to the creeks with his truck. They talked about Max Reading who operated out of Fox. Abe Simpson had a place on the waterfront. His nephew was Alex Simpson. Brick Jacobs started a brick shop right on Cushman. He had to move around after a fire came in and burned him out. Bob Sax also ran the store. He knew most of the merchants in town. When everyone traveled by boat everyone knew each other. He knew all the traders down the Yukon River. The airplanes came in later years. The interviewer asked about mail carriers in the winter. Dan said Charlie Sage was one of the mail carriers. Randall had the mail contract for the lower Yukon River. Bob Sheldon had the route between Fairbanks and the Richardson Highway. Later he knew the truckers who used the highway when he was a territorial salesman. He talked about Bob Bloom who had a store on Front Street facing the river. Dan talked about the merchandise in his store. Bob used to sit in an old barber's chair in his store. One of the old timers came into the store and asked for his bill which was eighteen years old. Bob sent all of his daughters to Dublin for their education. Charlie Main was one of the old timers. One day he invited Dan for a moose dinner. He served the moose with hair on it. He didn't take the hide off the moose. Charlie had a little bit of everything in his store. He stacked merchandise all over the place. He built a hotel next door to his store.

The NC Company was run by George Preston. Dan met George Preston's cousins while he was in South Africa. Dan was surprised to see American merchandise in the stores in South Africa. Dan talked about the people he wanted to visit while he was in Fairbanks. He talked about working as a salesman. When he visits Sitka he stops by to visit the Pioneer's Home. Ted Ketterson was one of the superintendents of the home. Karl Steele was another person who was from Fairbanks and was the secretary of Alaska (a position which later became secretary of the state)

Bob Summers has made his home in Juneau. He built the airfields at Galena, Moses Point and at Nome. He was an old government man who had been in charge of roads. He had worked at the federal level before it was a state. Harry Watson worked as the secretary of the miner's association.

The interviewer asked if he ever came over the White Pass. Dan said he came over by the railroad and not on foot. He built his own boat with a couple of other men to travel from Lake Bennett into the Yukon waters. They had to wait for breakup to float down to Dawson. They wanted to be there for the first jobs when Yukon River boats started out. They kept some boats at Dawson and some at St. Michael during the winter. He did that for three years. Shorty Armstrong, Guy Wilson and Lars Laren traveled with him. They walked the railroad the first year during May. It was sixty miles. There could be a difference of a month for the timing of the breakup. The interviewer asked about people who lived along the way. There was someone who lived at a coal mine along the way named Cod Finch. He was quite a character. He had a small tent with supplies. They would usually provision their boat at Lake Bennett. People would build their boat at Lake Bennett out of rip sawed lumber. It cost them twenty dollars to build a boat.

Interviewer asked about Captain A.J. Goeddert. Dan said he was one of the best known men. He was on the Kuskokwim for a while. Captain Blodsoe was an ex-Mississippi man as were several other men. Most of the western rivers had sternwheeler boats.

Dan talked about an old prospector on the Kuskokwim named Barnhardt. He came into the country on a little boat and was told to go over to the Kuskokwim. He prospected and struck it rich.

Interviewer asked about the telegraph line. Dan said that was all gone by the time he was there. They came over to St. Michael and Telegraph Creek. They had planned to go across the Bering Sea and across to Siberia.

They talked about Captain Goeddert who was associated with Captain Barnette. He was involved with the layout of Fairbanks. Dan said the NC Company should be given credit for development of the country. They gave credit to hundreds of men.