

H97-175-27

Frank Mussano

January 29, 1961

Fairbanks, Alaska

Harrie Hughes, interviewer

Some sections are difficult to understand

Frank Mussano was born in 1875 in Montenero, Italy. He came to the United States and worked in a tannery in Wisconsin. He decided to come to Alaska. He came to Dawson in 1901-1902 after coming over the Chilkoot Pass. They went prospecting. They did find gold on Little Blanche Creek in the Dawson area which runs into Horse Creek. They dug a hole close to the creek. When they returned it was full of water. They dug three holes and they all filled with water. They came into town and got a job. After a year they moved to Fairbanks in 1903. They went up to Cleary and mined gold. They had permission to work the ground for a percentage. They had gold but not very much. They were working in the summer time. In the fall they went over to Vault Creek. They dug a hole and it was nothing but permafrost and the pay was not very good so they quit. He worked for McKinley. He talked about sinking shafts. In one place he was able to get 25,000 worth of gold. They spread out from that area and started putting in points. The ground was so rich that they were getting one hundred dollars a pan. Some of the men he worked with were Jim Coonta, Martin Perelli, and Martin Silver. They worked for a year and made 100,000 dollars. They did clean up every day in the summer. The FE Company wanted to buy him out. He talked about Victor Sunshine buying one of his claims. Harrie commented that there is still good ground for gold mining and people don't want to work hard anymore. Frank said that he mined for thirty-five years. He talked about mining in the Tolovana area. Harrie asked how they lived when they mined. Frank said they stayed in a cabin owned by Labama. Harrie asked how they got their grub. Frank said it wasn't very long. They had to walk to town to get their supplies. Harrie asked about the ground at Ulnas. Frank talked about Max Manger. Harrie said Max Manger was now in the Pioneer Home at Sitka. Harry asked if he ever had dogs. Frank said he didn't have a dog team. He walked everywhere. He pulled his own sled. Harrie said he did the same thing. He walked as far as Ruby. He moved to Fairbanks to live in the 1930s. He had quit mining and started working for the city. Harrie asked him if he worked for Bob Weiner. Frank said he worked for Wise Mike. They talk about the different city foremen in Fairbanks. Frank said he didn't remember a lot of the names. They discussed Max Manger again. They discuss people going to the Pioneers Home in Sitka and the importance of the home. Harrie talked about the possibility of a Pioneers Home in Fairbanks. Harrie asked when Maroney came to Alaska. Frank said he came to Alaska in 1905 and worked for him mining for gold. Harrie asked about his family in Italy. Frank said he went back to Italy in 1908. He is the last surviving sibling in his family.

Harrie asked about getting supplies when he was mining in the early days. Frank said a gas car would come up on the Chatanika railroad. When it went up the hill they would have to help push it up the hill. He said W.A. Coghill would bring out supplies to the mining camps. He would come out and take orders. At one time he used a pushcart. Frank talked about Bobby Sheldon. Harry and Frank talked about Jim and Ruth Barrack.

Harrie asked about mining in the winter. Frank said they had a boiler and drove points to thaw the ground. It would take three days to thaw the ground. He described the mining shafts. They used four posts in the shaft and put a cap on it. Sometimes they would work two in a shaft.

Harrie asked if he knew Max Rudy from Fox. Frank said he knew him. Harrie asked if he was the first storekeeper. Frank said yes. He had a beautiful wife. Harrie talked about the bank taking over the store when he left because he owed so much money. Harrie talked about Max catching fish on the creek and up on the Chatanika, too. Frank said the fish were affected by the water coming from the mines. Frank talked about catching grayling on the Vault Creek. Frank talked about Henry Crook. He was a gold miner in Nome.