

H97-175-34 SIDE A

Frank Young

March 9, 1961

Fairbanks, Alaska

Harrie Hughes asked Frank about early Fairbanks court trials. Frank said he was familiar with the law in Fairbanks since 1906. He was a deputy marshal with L.T. Irwin who was a United States marshal. The first jail was built in 1903 and was located from across the Northway Building. They incarcerated the Blueberry Kid there at one time. He escaped by throwing pepper into the jailer's eyes. They built another jail on Cushman Street where the court house is located. There were three hangings that took place there. The first man to be hung was Marlo Sigura. He was a Black man from Iditarod. He was convicted of premeditated murder. He had several reprieves and was in the jail for three years. He was hung in 1916. There were two Natives hung. One of them was from Shageluk Slough. He had killed his brother. Frank stood on the scaffold with Dr. Sutherland. He was decapitated during his hanging. The other Native was from the Kuskokwim area and was hung in 1918. Harrie asked who the first marshal in Fairbanks was. Frank said he knew L.T. Irwin but there was another one before him named Love. The first judge was Judge Wickersham. Harrie asked if there was a vigilante committee set up in Fairbanks in the early days. Frank said there wasn't one around in Fairbanks but there was one in Skagway. Harrie asked about the people who came into town in the spring. Frank said there weren't too many that were gun packers. There were all prospectors and miners who came into town. There's a different class of people that come into town now. Harrie asked him if he knew Coghill. Frank said Coghill used to deliver newspapers to Ester Creek by horse and buggy in 1908. Harrie said he used a push cart before that. He used to go around to all the miners on the creek and take orders and fill them in town. He later went to Nenana and married. Harrie said he used to buy furs. Harrie asked about Jim Higgins. Frank said Jim was the official at the first hanging in Fairbanks. Frank described the problem with the first hanging. Frank said Jim worked in Homish, Washington as a young man. He ran away from Washington. Jim shot a man in Nenana. Harrie asked about Len Smith from Circle and talked about him. He was later made the liquor license marshal during prohibition in the state of Washington and conducted raids. Frank said he knew him in Ruby when he was a watch maker. Harrie talked about Pinky Thompson. Frank said he knew him when he was a United States marshal.

Harrie asked what they did for entertainment in the winter in early-day Fairbanks. Frank said they had home talent shows, ice skating rinks, horse and cutter rides, and dances on the creeks. They would travel out to the creeks on big sleds. Harrie asked about Charlie Porter. Frank said he was a trapper. Harrie said he used to drive the horse stage from Valdez. Frank said he knew him when he trapped. Harrie said Porter used to come into the Nordale Hotel at night and talk to him. He said a lot of people came into town and had rooms on a permanent basis at the Hotel even if they didn't come in and use them. Frank talked about Dirty Face Porter. He was a wood cutter and teamster. He cut up wood after forest fires and was always dirty. Harrie asked about Frank's nickname. Frank said they used to call him Brigham because of Brigham Young. Frank said the name stayed with him until he was in his 60s.

Harrie asked about the line in town. Frank said there were three dance halls on the line. The Flora Dora took in a whole block. There were about two hundred ladies of the evening on the line. The Fast Track was a smaller dance hall that was right on the line. Across the street was the Panamy which was "first class" big affair with oil paintings on the walls. They all had gambling on the side. Frank described the different types of gambling they had. There was lots of gold money in those days. Harrie talked about fifty dollar slugs. Frank said they weren't in Fairbanks. Harrie talked about the mines in Arizona that had guards. Frank said they always had guards when they moved the gold. Sometimes the U.S. marshal also helped.

Harrie asked about the shipments of gold before the time of the railroad. Frank said all the gold was put into bricks. They had a couple of assay offices in town. The gold was shipped out mostly by boat in the summer. In the winter they kept the gold in the banks. There wasn't too much kept in the winter. It was mostly handled in the summer when the biggest part of the mining took place. Frank described the iron boxes they used for the gold bricks. Harrie asked what year they started using the American express chests. Frank thought that was in about 1915. He said there were several gold dust and gold brick robberies. One of the shipments was shipped out on the steamer Tanana. They were going to transfer the shipment at Tanana. Miller robbed the bricks. He went into Smith's gun store and bought a bunch of shot. He got the gold bricks out of the containers and replaced it with shot. He hid the gold under mattresses. Miller returned the gold to Fairbanks on the Tanana. Miller was a waiter on the boat. He put some of the gold under in a warehouse in Fairbanks and in several other places. They finally found out where the shot was purchased and they figured out it was Miller. He was tried and convicted. He was sentenced to ten years. They aren't sure if he ever recovered all the gold. The robbery was about 1907.

Harrie asked about a period of years when there weren't any robberies because people couldn't get out of town. Harrie said that the Blueberry Kid managed to get away with robbery. Harrie mentioned a dog sled mail robbery out of Valdez. Harrie said the Blue Parka man held up several pack trains coming in from the creeks. He robbed two or three men coming from Dalton Creek. One of the men was Bishop Rowe. He took his watch and a few dollars.

Harrie said the old timers and their stories are gone. Harrie described a murder of Thomas Wright who was a jailer in town.

Harrie asked Mr. Lewinski when he came to Alaska. Audrey Taylor Lewinski said he is known as Lou. He came to Alaska in 1955 after serving in the Navy. He attended school at the University of Alaska and received a master's degree in wildlife management in 1958. He started working at the university museum for Dr. Skarland as an associate curator. He was born in New Jersey in 1929. He attended Cornell. His parents were Audrey Taylor Lewinski and Jadwiga Lewinski. His brother, Thomas is in the Army. Harrie asked him what he thought of getting the interviews on tapes. Lou said it is a commendable project. Many people won't take the time to write but they are willing to talk to other people about their experiences. He sees the long term value of the recording. Harrie asked if there is any program at the University of Alaska which deals with the history of Alaska. Lou said the history department does have a class.

Lou Lewinski lists the people from a list of possible members to be included on the editorial board for the historical society. The names were Earl Pilgrim, Lou Lewinski, Charles Keim, Frank P. Young, Harrie Hughes, Ivar Skarland, Fred West, Andy Wicken, Forbes Baker, Francis Baker, Adriana Coyle, Annabeth Hamlin, Audrey Loftus, Florence Manville, and J. Victor Richardson. The committee also had suggestions for the letter to be sent to the prospective members.