

ORAL HISTORY 97-175-37

Jens Weltzin, Clara Rust

Tanana Yukon Historical Society meeting

Fairbanks, Alaska

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Jens is asked what brought him to Alaska. Jens said he was working on a street car in Seattle. The wages were low and the hours were bad sometimes working twenty hours in a row. He got tired of that and decided to come north. He went up to Slate Creek with someone he met in Seattle. It took eight days to get to Valdez. They were expecting to get a lay on some property and it didn't happen. They took jobs at a copper mine. It was 165 miles from Valdez. Twenty men started on the trip. It was tough going without a trail. They got to Tonsina and stayed at a roadhouse. They got to Chitina and still had twenty-five miles to go. When he got to the mine he thought the men looked unhealthy and decided not to work there. He went to work on the Copper River Railroad. They slept in large tents with 300 men. There was two feet of water between the bunks. He ended up being sick most of the time. He worked until the middle of June. He started on the trail to Fairbanks. They walked during the night when the glacier fed streams were a little lower. He felt better by the time he got to Fairbanks after eleven days of walking. He went out to the creeks to look for work. He worked for Walter Fisher for two weeks. He then worked for Witz Williams at Goldstream and finished on Pedro Creek. This was in 1910. He worked on a lay that winter. During clean up in the spring he made 200 dollars for eight months of work. He then left Pedro and went over to Eldorado. He went to work for Billy Burns. In 1915 he had a chance to buy the store at Eldorado. He had the store and worked at a mine for Hans Hess. In 1916 he went into the teaming business. He worked at Chatanika and had a store. He started a store in 1938 on Fairbanks Creek which he sold in 1952. He worked on the dredges at Chatanika for eleven years. He then went Outside and lived in Palo Alto. After a year in California his wife suggested they return to Alaska in 1954. Someone asked where the mine was on the Eldorado. Jens said it was right at the lower end right at the railroad track. Jens said there were a lot of people on Goldstream Creek. The Little Eldorado had over two hundred people living there. There were quite a few people at Olnes. There would be three or four hundred people in Chatanika in the evenings. Someone ask where Sam Wise was from. Jens said he was from Pennsylvania and was in the Chatanika area and was in Cleary for a while. He died in 1933. He was a member of the Arctic Brotherhood in Cleary. They called their building the AB Hall. Nordale had a hotel in Cleary. Alfred Ghezzi had a store in Chatanika for many years. Paul Rings had a store there, too. He said that a lot of the old timers are gone. He was married on June 15, 1912. He wasn't required to have a marriage license. Jens talked about Larson who mined on Fairbanks Creek. Jens was born in Minnesota on December 6, 1883. He is of Norwegian descent with a German name. He left Minnesota in 1905 and ended up in Spokane Washington for a year. He worked in the woods for a while. He milked cows for a short while. He described his day on a dairy farm. He then worked Idaho, Oregon and returned to Washington. He ended up working on a street car for two years. Jens talked about mining work in

Alaska. He said it was hard work. He described using points to thaw the ground. He was paid five dollars a day plus board. They had a strike in 1907 or 08. They wanted higher wages and lower ^{hours} wages. They didn't get what they wanted. Their hours were later cut down along with their wages. They worked eight hours a day for 4.50. Bigelow paid less at Fox. The last year he worked on the mine was in 1916. He was working on the Eldorado. He described a mine cave in where he was working. He then worked for the FE Company. He worked for them for thirty years. He talked about a few men who were killed while they were mining. He worked for Henry Hamilton and the ground was treacherous. Someone asked about drift mining. Jens talked about the dangers of mining. Someone asked about the layout of a mine. Jens said when you sunk a shaft to see the extension of a deposit. You put in a cross cut on both sides of the main tunnel and work back towards the shaft. He worked for Walter Christian (?) in 1912. They took as much as 500 buckets a day out of a shaft. He talked about using cold water or steam to drive points. He said the best way is to use water because it doesn't slough so much. Jens said sometimes there is pay in the bedrock and sometimes it is in the gravel. Cold water was pumped. There were four or five points that were driven. The first time he drove points he didn't think he would stay with it. He worked on the Eldorado driving points. He was asked who the biggest operators were. Jens said Henry Hamilton was a big operator. They had about forty men on each shift. Walter Fisher had a big operation, too. Gus Levin was a big operator, too. The Larson brothers ran a big crew for two or three years. Henry Waggoner was working on Goldstream Creek with a big crew.

Jens had four sons. His oldest son, Lenard, died in 1939. One of his sons works for the FE Company. Howard works in San Francisco. Jimmy is an accountant who works in Seattle. His wife died in 1959. She was born in Pennsylvania and her family lived in Seattle when she was a young girl.

Bob Smith delivered papers on Cleary Creek. Jens said Roy Lund used to sell papers on Pedro Creek. He talked about mail deliveries and how long it would take to get mail sometimes. Eldorado didn't have a post office so they would get their mail at Chatanika. There was also a post office at Cleary. There were banks at both places, too. He had a store at Chatanika. They also had a bank at Dome. They were privately owned banks. Jens talked about the Copper River Railroad. He served on the school board in Chatanika for six years. Someone in audience talked about a school at Cleary. Jens talked about visiting Dawson and Eagle.

Clara Rust talked briefly about the early July 4th celebrations in Fairbanks. She talked about traveling on the Tanana Valley Railroad and sitting on flatbed cars from the creeks to Fairbanks. They started in Chatanika at eight in the morning and got into Fairbanks about 5:30 at night. They stopped at every little town along the way to pick people up. They would have to stop along the way to get wood for the wood-burning engine. In the winter they would have to put an engine on each end of the train to power through the drifts. She went out to Eldorado Creek as a bride.