

H97-66-09

Ralph Rivers Martha Rivers

Tanana Yukon Historical Society meeting

Ralph J. Rivers parents were Julian and Louisa Rivers. He was born in 1903 in Renie Beach near Seattle. His father became intrigued by the gold rush. He traveled in 1905 to Skagway and traveled to Whitehorse. His dad teamed up with Ralph Norton and they traveled down the Yukon River to Dawson. His father worked for the Yukon Gold Company in Dawson. He worked as a bookkeeper for several years. He joined his mother and brother, Victor in 1906 for a trip to Whitehorse and then by paddle wheel riverboat to Dawson. During the years in Dawson his dad became known as J.G. and by the time he came to Alaska he became Guy Rivers. They lived in Dawson for six years. His sister, Zenayed was born in Dawson and held Canadian and American citizenship. He remembers kindergarten in Dawson. He attended a Catholic school in first grade. His mother became ill with cancer and she died in 1912. They were living in Gold Hill when he broke his leg while sledding. He was put in traction for six weeks. He credits his doctor for his good care. A Mrs. Bailey took the children back to Seattle after his mother died. They moved in with an aunt who also had three children. They attended school in Seattle. They later moved into the home of another aunt. They also lived with their grandfather. After a year they joined their father in Iditarod. His father had married Florence Mae Kayhill. They called her mother Rivers. His sister had pneumonia before they left so she stayed with their grandfather. They arrived in St. Michael's and then traveled by paddle wheel steamboat. They took another smaller boat up the Innoko River. They took a boat up the Iditarod River. They stayed with Mrs. Brewis for a day. His father picked them up a day late and they traveled by rails in an automobile to Flat. They lived on the Flat River. His father was working for Dave Stranberg. They attended a small schoolhouse with the Stranberg children. Their teacher was Miss Coolidge who later married Harry Donally. The second winter they lived on Otter Creek at Discovery. They had a four mile hike to school and in the winter they would mush dogs to school. He remembers how dark it was traveling to school. He finished the eighth grade and went Outside to high school. He talked about little pockets of gold that were left behind after dredging. He and his brother would use a little rocker to find gold. They were called to gold dust twins. Both of them became interested in gold mining. They mined in the summer when school was out. He remembers his step-mother going out to Washington to have Guy, Jr. (Russell Guy Rivers), all of the other children were born in Alaska. He went out to high school in Seattle. Victor came out the following year. He graduated in 1921 and returned to Alaska. He went to Flat where his father was working for George Riley. There was a strike when he traveled back to Alaska. He worked his way back to St. Michael. It took thirteen days to get to St. Michael. He traveled to Holy Cross. He worked from Holy Cross to Iditarod for Charlie Samson. His father moved down to Flat. There were five Rivers kids by that point. He worked as the assistant post master and his stepmother was the post master. Once a month the mail would arrive by dog team. There were twenty-one huskies/malemites on the team and they could carry 2,000 pounds of mail. He took correspondence courses in law. He had his first case with Charlie Knutsen who was accused of being a bootlegger. The trial took place and Charlie had a hung jury. They dismissed the case. He had several men give him 300 dollars to further his law education. They had the only cow in town. He sold bottles of milk up and down the creek. In summer he stayed out on Otter Creek and mined. He explains how they mined with water. He partnered with Hans Galnick. They did discover hard rock showings. They prospected the bank. They had good ore but it needed smelting and it was too expensive to ship off for smelting. He decided to go off to university. Bill Duffy brought in a pouch that needed to go back to

McGrath. The gold was stolen at Shurmeyer's Roadhouse. He graduated from law school in 1929. He practiced for two years in Seattle before coming to Fairbanks.

He lists all of his family:

J.G. Rivers, his father

Florence Mae Rivers, his stepmother

Victor C. Rivers, his brother

Zanayed Rivers Grigsby, his sister

Virginia Rivers Profitt, his sister

Muriel Rivers Spears, his sister

Fern Rivers, his sister

Russell "Guy" Rivers, his brother

Richard Rivers, his brother